Sulfur 23

NEW TRANSLATIONS OF TSVETAYEVA AND LORCA

WRITING BY A NUMBER OF YOUNGER AMERICAN POETS

ARTWORK BY LEON GOLUB, THOMAS DANIEL, THORPE FEIDT, AND ROBERT TURNEY

KEN EDWARDS ON NEW ENGLISH POETRY

AN EXCERPT FROM MAXINE HONG KINGSTON'S NEW NOVEL

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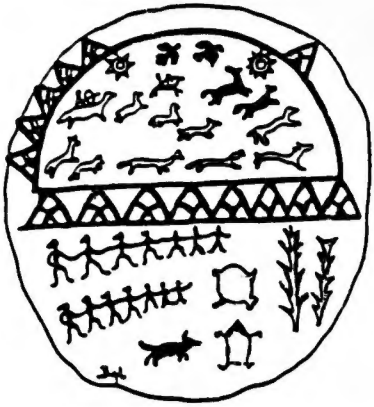

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SULFUR magazine has its main offices c/o English Department, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 (telephone: 313/483-9787). Subscriptions are $15 (3 issues) for individuals, $22 for institutions; a single copy is $7. Current issue is Vol. VIII, #2. Foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $3 for book rate mail, $12 for air mail postage. Make checks to SULFUR in U.S. currency. Back issues (except #1) are available. CLAIMS FOR MISSING NUMBERS can be honored only within 3 months after publication. No unsolicited manuscripts will be returned unless accompanied by SASE. ISSN #: 0730-305X.

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DESIGN AND TYPOGRAPHY BY BARBARA MARTIN
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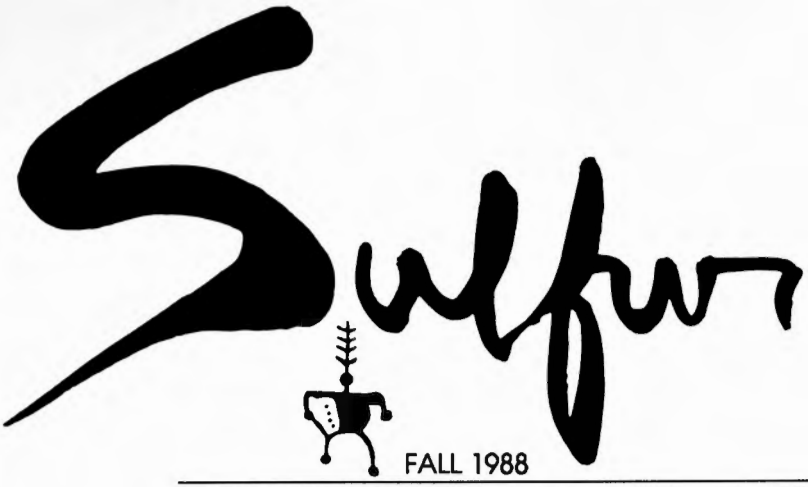

FALL 1988

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: LEON GOLUB / TWO HEADS I
(1986, 21" x 68"). Photo by David Reynolds. Courtesy of Hans Neuendorf Gallery, Frankfurt.

1988 issues of *Sulfur* are made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

from *Runes* / Section 30

The permafrost is broken, tundra softened into marsh
now the melt-water appears on the grass

The village is no longer a separate thing
from a living village, the dead no more
sway from their hips like stalks, agrin
and desperately achatter

The adulteress naked
except for a collar of ox-skin
A woven band blindfolds the eyes,
the left side of the head is shaved
Not far away a man older than she,
strangled with a hazel wand

The constellations are tethered to the tree,
the insouciant and light-blooded gods
smiling and swinging their legs
in the branches

The aurochs snorts.

A moon drifts beyond caring.

My devotions were attended by all the
insects of the night, the unwanted wisdom.
I have done all I could
to appear mirthful.

GEORGE BUTTERICK, 1973

The *Sulfur* masthead photographed by Robert Turney, on the front porch of the Eshlemans' home in Ypsilanti, on the occasion of *"Sulfur* Live," a Symposium on Poetry and Poetics, held at Eastern Michigan University, April 1988. From left to right, front row: Jerome Rothenberg, Jed Rasula, Marjorie Perloff. Second row: Clayton and Caryl Eshleman, Charles Bernstein, Rachel Blau DuPlessis. Third row: James Clifford, Michael Palmer, Clark Coolidge, Eliot Weinberger, John Yau.

MARINA TSVETAYEVA

POEM OF THE END

(Tr. from the Russian
by John Dolan)

In the sky, rusty as tin,
finger of a post.
He stood at the appointed place
like fate.

A quarter to. On time?
Death doesn't wait.
Exaggeratedly smooth,
tipping his hat.

Each eyelash a summons.
Mouth down.
Exaggeratedly deep
His bow.

A quarter to. Exactly?
Voice lied.
Heart fell—what's he doing?
Brain; why?

Sky of ugly omens.
Even tin rusts.
He waited, the usual place.
Time: six.

A silent kiss—
Dazed lips,
Like kissing a queen's hand
or a corpse. . .

Through swirls of the simple folk—
Ribs meeting elbows—
Exaggeratedly harsh
The work whistle rose.

Rose, like a dog's howl,
Sullen, sustained,
(Exaggeration of life
On the last day.)

What yesterday lapped at the waist—
today, to the stars.
Exaggeratedly; that is,
Full size.

In my mind: Darling, Darling!
Seven was the time.
"To the movies, or—"
Howled: "Home!"

2

The brotherhood of a Gypsy camp,
That's where it led—
Like thunder inside the head
Or a naked blade—

Like all the terrors
Of the words we wait for
Like a house collapsing:
The word home.

"Home!", like a spoiled
Lost brat's whine,
A one-year-old's list:
"Give" and "Mine"!

My brother in sin,
My chill and warm,
That's how they rush to get out—
The way you howl, "Home!"

Like a horse jerking free of the bridle
Up! And the rope in shreds.
Home—there's not even a building!
There is. A few steps on.

"A home on a hill." "No higher?"
"On top of the hill. —A home;
With a window right under the roof
That *not from the sunrise alone*

Burns?—A restoration
Of Life? Poetically simple!
Home—that means out of the house
Each night.
O who to tell

My grief, my pain,
Fear greener than ice?"
"You've been thinking too much."
Thoughtfully: "Yes."

3

And an embankment. I keep close
To water, like thick to dense.
Semiramide's gardens
Hung there like this.

I keep close to the water,
The steel strip, color
Of death—like a singer
To her notes, a blind man

to a wall. "Come back to me?"
No? Listen—then I'll lean

Toward the quencher-of-every-thirst,
Keeping close, like one walking in sleep

On the roof's edge. . .
                But I'm not afraid
Of the river—born a Naiad!
I hold close to the river, like a hand
When a lover is close

And faithful. . .
                The dead are faithful.
Yes, but not all have a place.
Death on the left, on the right hand
You. Your side, like a corpse.

Light, rippling like a sheaf.
A laugh like a cheap tambourine.
"You and I, we have to
                (shivers)
—So let's be brave, shall we?"

4

A fog of blond.
Wave of gauze ruffles.
Breath-fouled, smoke-fouled,
But mostly: talk—
What's it smell like? Like hurry,
Indulgence and tiny sins,
Commercial secrets
And deodorant powder.

Familied bachelors with rings,
Venerable youths.
Joked about, laughed about,
But most of all—counted out,
Both bills and coins,
Soft snouts in down
. . .Like commercial transactions
And deodorant powder.

I'm half turned away—is *this*
Our house? I won't be hostess!

Above his checkbook, one—
Above a dainty hand, another—
Above a patent-leathered foot, another—
Working quietly.
. . .Like commercial marriages
And deodorant powder.

A notched silver tooth
In the window—the Star of Malta!
. . .Stroked and squeezed,
But most of all—felt-up.
Pinched. . .(So it's yesterday's
Food—don't mind the odor.)
. . .Like commercial tricks
And deodorant powder.

Your chain's too short? Well,
It's platinum, not steel!
Their triple chins shake—
Calves cooking veal!
Above their sugar-dusted necks
The devil in a gaslamp.
. . .Like commercial failures
And another powder—
Bertold Schwartz'. . .
Brilliant
He was, the people's protector.
"You and I, we have
To talk; shall we be brave?"

5

I catch his lips' movement
And know he won't speak first.
"So you don't love me?" "I do."
"You don't!" "—But in torment,

Drunk and exhausted."
(An eagle looking the land over.)
"God help me, this is our home?"
"A home in my heart." "What *folklore!*"

Love is flesh and blood,
Your own blood's color poured.
Your home of love is
table-talk;

A little while, then home again?
Like gentlemen and ladies?
Love—that means. . .
Temple?
Scar. Child, cut scar

On scar, and right in their sight—
Every servant, every guest!
(I say silently: Love is the bow
Bent back—the bow—let go—)

Love is at least. . .link.
We're separate; lips—lives—
I begged you not to curse
Our hour, sacred, close.

That hour on the crest of the hill
And of passion. The memory; steam.
Love's all fine gifts dumped
In the fire—for free!

His mouth—slit like a shell.
Pale inventory—not a smile.
"And most of all a bed
Alone."
"A bed—you mean

A cliff." Drum roll
Of fingers. "I don't want miracles!

Love; that's just
my own."
"I see, yes. So; now?"

The drum roll of his fingers
Grows. (The scaffold and the square.)
"Let's go." But I: "Let's die—
That would be simpler.

Enough of this cheap stuff;
Rhymes, railroads, rooms over stations;
Love must mean life."
"No. . .It was called by the ancients

Something else—"
And?
Scrap
Of hankie, dangling like a fish.
"Shall we go? Your way?"
"Poison, rails, bullet—take your pick!

Death! And no deals at all!"
"Life!" Like a Roman commander,
Surveying the Legions'
Remnants.
"So we part."

6

"That's not what I wanted.
Not that." (I told
You, love's the body's job,
We want each other's souls,

These days. . .). He has nothing to say.
(Yes, when the train rolls in
You hand your women the pain,

The honor of parting,
Like a toast.) Am I dreaming?
I heard him wrong? . . .Civil liar,
You hand your lover the bloody honor
Of the break; a bouquet. . .

Distinctly. Sound after sound—
"We part," you said?
(As a handkerchief to the ground
In a moment of sweet

Indifference falls. . .) In this battle
You're Caesar (O, insolent lunge!
Bestow your opponent, like a medal
With the sword she must give up!)

And on and on. A hum
In my ears. I bow twice
To you, unsurpassed
In the endgame.

Don't deny it—a vengeance
Worthy of Lovelace,
A noble gesture
That sliced me, flesh

From bone. —A chuckle. Through laughter
Death. A gesture. And no more desire.
Yes, wanting's the body's job,
We're ghosts to each other

These days. . .) The last nail
Goes in (Last screw, since the coffin's lead).
"One last favor then—
I ask you: not a word

About us—to my. . .I mean. . .
Successors. . ." (On their stretchers,

Thus the wounded talk of Spring!)
—I ask you that favor."

Shall I give you a keepsake—a ring?
No. His glance gapes open,
Vacant. *(Let the stamp*
On thy heart be the ring

On thy hand. . .) No scenes now!
A gulp then, and quieter, softer,
"A book?" A book. Your usual.
No, you don't even write them—

Books. . .

So must not
So must not
Must not cry.

In our itinerant
Fishermen's Brotherhoods
They dance, they don't cry.

They drink and don't cry.
With their own hot blood
They pay, they don't cry.

Pearls in a glass
Melt, and a world
They rule, they don't cry.

So I'm out? Harlequin,
I see it at last—
You throw your Pierrette
The honor—like a bone—

The prize and honor of the end,
The curtain-dropping gesture.
Closing speech. When an inch of lead
In the breast would be better,

Warmer—cleaner—
Teeth
Pinch my lips.
Must not cry.

Hardest
Into softest;
Just don't cry.

In the wandering brotherhoods
They die but don't cry
Are burned and don't cry.

With ashes and songs
They hide the dead body
In the wandering brotherhoods. . .

—So me first? First move?
Like chess? But I insist,
Even on the scaffold
We get a request—
Quick
I request—Don't look. (His look.)
They're almost falling—thick and fast—
But I can't push them back
In my eyes and I *asked*
Don't
Look!

Now, plain and clear,
Looking off at the sky—
Dear, please, let's go—
I'm going to cry—

I'd forgotten; among the sellers,
The wallets come to life,
How blond glints the back of his head—
Corn, Wheat, rye!

And all the commandments of Sinai
Wash away now. . .Maenad's fur!
The great Golden Fleece,
A consolation store

(For us all!)—Not in vain
Nature hoards her wealth; not without plan!
Hunters! From this blond maze
Do you know the path

Back?

7

And an embankment. The last.
Of all. Separately, hands apart,
Like sulky neighbors
We walk. By the banks,

Weeping—and lick the falling
Salt, not caring.
No huge moon of Solomon's
Hangs for me in Heaven.

A post. Just beat my head
Bloody; why not? Better yet—
Into bits? Careful accomplices. . .
(Body identified as Love).

Can these be two lovers?
Out through the night? Diverging?
"You see; the future must be
so?" I jerk my head away.

To doze like newlyweds!
To sleep! But we can't get in step,
In tact. Begging him: take my hand—
We're not convicts, we don't have to—

Shock (as of soul touching hand,
Passed hand-to-hand) the current beating
Through fevered synapse,
Tearing—on my soul this arm leans.

Clings.

Clings. Rainbow around us. And tears
Most of all—curtain thicker than beads—
Rain. Can such embankments
End ever? A bridge.
Well?

This is the place? Your hearse awaits.
His peaceful eyes
Raised, "Shall I see you home?"
For one last time.

8

The. Last. Bridge.
(Won't take my hand away!)
Last bridge,
Final toll.

Water and earth.
I hold out the coins.
Money for death,
Charon's fare across Lethe.

Coins fall to shadow
In his shadowed hand—Soundless
That money;
So to the hand's shade

Shadow coins,
No glint or jingle.
Coins for the dead;
They have poppies enough.

The bridge.

Mostly, those
Who love can't hope.
Bridge like this passion,
Stretched across convention.

I nestle; it's warm
By your side so I lean.
Not *to*—not even *toward*—
This one moment's vision:

No arms no legs
Only my side
Leaning against you
Is still alive!

All life in my side—
He's just echo and ear—
Like yolk to white
I stick—like Samoyeds to fur,

I press, I cling,
Keeping us closer
Than Siamese twins—
That woman, Mother

You called her—who forgot
The whole world to carry you,
Hoarding her triumph—
She never knew

This closeness. Wait! Stay!
—When you lay on my breasts. . .
And I won't jump now.
I can't dive, my hand still presses

Yours. I blink and blink. . .
Holding you fast.
Bridge, you're no husband—
A lover, slipping past.

But bridge, hold us well—
Bodies are the river's favorite food!
I grip like ivy to a wall,
Like a tick—my roots must be removed!

Like ivy! Like a tick!
Godless and manless!
To throw me away like a thing,
When nobody ever cared less

For all the things of this
Thing'd inflated world. I'm dreaming,
Tell me I'm dreaming; it's night
And after the night the morning—

And an express to Rome
Or Grenada? I won't even know,
Sloughing off the Mont Blanc,
Himalayas of bedclothes.

These are the depths.
It's my last blood that warms you.
Listen to these ribs;
What they say is truer.

And. . .squinting to the side,
How far you are already.

Than poems. . .are you warm?
And tomorrow, who will you find?
Tell me I imagined this!
That the bridge does not, will not have

An end. . .
The End.

9

It rings like a factory,
Responsive to the call—
What wives keep from husbands, widows from friends—
The secret; hoarded, sublingual,

Eve's since the tree;
Here it is, yours at last:
I am no more than an animal
Someone stabbed in the guts.

And it burns. . .as if the soul had ripped
With the skin—and spilled like steam from the hole,
That notorious, punctured heresy,
The so-called soul.

That pale Christian ailment—
Steam! The only poultice they can give!
There never was any such thing!
There was a body, wanted to live,

Doesn't want to.

Forgive me—that's not what I meant!
As the disemboweled scream.
As the condemned wait
For the courtyard, 4:00 a.m.,

Playing chess. . .with a smile,
To mock the corridor's eye.
The chessmen are all only pawns!
And somebody's playing us.

Who? Good Gods? Thieves?
The peephole fills with eye.
The red corridor creaks.
And now the bold will rise—

Take one more puff.
Spit. Screw it all. Spit.
Along this chessboard path
It's a straight line to the ditch,

To blood. To the secret peephole,
The peeking window of the moon. . .
. . . . . .
And—squinting to my side—
How far you are already.

10

Together, in step,
We jump—it's our coffeehouse!

Our island, our shrine,
Where we in the mornings

—Rabble paired off for a minute!—
Would celebrate matins.

Like some sleazy marketplace
In a dream haze, or spring. . .
The coffee was awful there,
Nothing but oats!

(With oats you can calm
The fussiest trotters!)

No Arab perfume,
The smell of Arcadia

Came from that coffee. . .

But how she would smile at us,
Sit us beside her;
Mournful, experienced
Grey-headed mistress,

Smiling so hopefully—
"You'll wither soon; live!"
Smiled at our lunacy, poverty,
Smiled at our yawns and our love.

But mostly our youth,
Our laughs for no reason,
Our smiles without thought,
At a face without wrinkles.

Most of all at our youth,
Our out-of-place passion,
Blown in from somewhere,
Pouring from God-knows-where

To her dim little coffeehouse.
(Burnoose and Tunis!)
At our hope and our muscle
In unravelling clothes.

(Oh, no complaints, friend!
Scars do get scarred!)
Oh, how she'd see us out—
Hostess, hat hard

As Dutch ironing.

Not quite recalling, never really getting it,
They led us, somehow, away from the fair.
Our street! But not ours now.
How often, strolling it—not 'we' anymore.

—Tomorrow the Sun will rise in the west!
—David and Jehovah will divorce!
What are we doing? We're *separating*.
But what is it good for,

Supernaturally senseless word!
We're sep-ar-ating. (One from a hundred?)
Just a word, four syllables,
And after it the void.

Stop! Is it Serbo-, or -Croatian?
Did these Czechs make it up?
Sep-aration. To separate.
It's some little-known duck!

Some sound to shred the ear,
Expand the borders of grief.
Separation—it's not in Russian,
In Man, in Woman!

Not in God's tongue! What are we, sheep
To stand around bleating?
Separation—what's that mean?
There's no definition!

No sound even—well, a hollow noise,
As, for example, of someone sawing through dreams—
Separation—that's Khlebnikov's school;
The groaning of nightingales,
Swan-ish. . .
But how did it happen?
—Like a reservoir drains.
Hand against hand. . .
Separate. . .Thunder in the brain—

And the ocean visits the stateroom!
This is Oceania's furthest cape!
The streets are just too steep;
To go down is to separate.

Downhill. Sighing of two soles.
Palm, meet, finally, the nail.
This is a capsized argument.
To separate means: unravel,

We who were knit into one.

11

To lose it all at once—
There's nothing as pure and plain!
Outskirts, suburbs,
An end to days.

To blisses (read: rocks)
To days and to us.

Vacant dachas! I honor
You, aging mothers.
It's good work, to stand empty.
The hollow don't stand empty.

(Dachas, empty by a third,
You'd be better off burned!)

Just don't shudder,
Don't open the wound.
Outskirts, suburbs,
Like a ravelling seam!

Since (without the surplus gleam
of words) love is a seam.

A seam, not a bandage or shield.
Oh, don't ask for cover!

The seam the dead sew in a field,
That I sewed in you.

(Time will show how it held—
Like cheap stuff or triple thread!)

One way or another, friend,
Right along the seam!
But at least the seam rent; see,
The fabric hasn't rotted!

So under the tailor's chalk lines
There are still living veins!

Oh he who rips
Will never lose.
Outskirts, suburbs,
Foreheads' divorce.

They're hanging people in the district
These days—the brain feels a draft!

Oh he will never lose who's off
Before the sun is up.
In one night I sewed you a life,
A good fit—and never used a tape!

So don't complain if this suburb
Ripped, like a rent seam.

The soul's untidiness—
Those scars!
Outskirts, suburbs,
Oh fierce

Is the suburbs' expanse. The heel of fate—
Do you hear it, sucking through the mud?
Then judge my quick hands' work,
My friend—and the living thread,

So tenacious—don't finish it off!
The last light!

Here? It must be a plot—
(glancing). . .by the lower races—
(glancing). Can we go up the hill?
For the last time.

12

Like a horse's mane.
Rain in our eyes. Hills.
We've passed the suburbs,
We're past the city.

It's there, but not ours.
Stepmother, not mother.
There's nowhere more.
To die here.

Field. Fence.
Brother stands with sister.
Life is an outskirt.
Build far from the city.

Ech, it's a losing
Cause, me lord,
Everything's suburb!
Where's the damn city?

Tearing, slashing
Rain. We tear and slash.
In three months
Our first togetherness.

Even from Job,
God, you wanted a loan?
But it didn't go through,
We're past the city.

Past it! See? Beyond!
Outside! Over the wall!
Life is the place where living's forbidden,
The Hebrew Quarter.

So isn't it better, a hundred times better,
To become the eternal Jew?
Since for everyone not a reptile
It's the same old pogrom?

Life. Only the converts live.
Judases all.
Let's go to the Lepers' Islands!
To Hell! Anywhere but

Life—only suffers converts,
Sheep to the butcher.
My right-to-exist card;
I trample it!

Stamp on it—for the Star of David!
Vengeance—for the bodies heaped!
Isn't it charming; turns out the Yids
Didn't even want to live!

13

That's how knives are sharpened on stone.
That's how sawdust is swept with brooms.
Now, under my hands,
Something wet and furred.

Where are your twins—
Male dryness and strength?
In my palms—
Tears, not rain!

O what temptations are left
To mention? Property is water!
It was your diamond eyes I felt
In my hands—flowing—

There's no more loss
For me. The end of ends.
I stroke—and stroke
Your face with my hands.

That's how we are, us Marinas—
We've got this Polish pride.
And since I felt your hawk's eyes
In my hands, crying. . .

Crying! My friend!
My all! I'm sorry!
How large they were,
Whole handfuls, salty!

Grim male tears,
Like thunder in the dark.
Tears! There'll be others
To make up your shame with me.

Fish from the same
Sea! A netful. . .
Of all dead shells.
Lips against lips.

In tears.
As wormwood
To the taste.
—And tomorrow
When I wake?

14

A sheep trail, a slope.
The city noise.
Three whores approach
Laughing. At tears.

Laughing—full noon breasts
Rising like waves' crests,
Laughing at those sinful,
Shameful, male

Tears of yours, in the rain
Shining like twin scars,
Pearls sewn obscenely
On breastplate of bronze.

These first tears and last—
Let them pour down!
Each one is a pearl
In my crown.

My eyes will not turn.
I glare through the rain.
Venereal dolls—stare on!
Ours is a bond

That draws even tighter
Than the clamp of the lay.
Before our words
The Song of Songs gives way.

For us improbable birds,
Solomon must kneel,
For our crying together
Is more than a dream.

So through the hollow waves
Of the night, drawn close and still,

Sightless, soundless,
We sink like a ship.

A Note on Marina Tsvetayeva's "Poem of the End"

Marina Tsvetayeva was born in Moscow in 1892. She began writing poetry as a teenager and published her first volume of poems, ***Evening Album***, while still in high school. The book was a critical success, and Tsvetayeva was soon hailed as one of Russia's leading poets.

However, much of Tsvetayeva's best work was written in relative obscurity while she was living in exile in Prague and Paris. She was forced to flee her homeland after her husband, Sergei Efron, fought on the Czarist side during the Russian Revolution. This was a period of great tragedy for Tsvetayeva—she lost a daughter to starvation and spent five years separated from her husband, uncertain of his fate. Their eventual reunion was far from redemptive. They lived in severe poverty. He was ill with tuberculosis; she became involved in several ill-fated love affairs—including the affair with Konstantin Borisovich Rodzevitch which is obsessively chronicled in "Poem of the End."

Tsvetayeva was an intensely personal, Romantic poet. Her work is both confessional and technically innovative. In addition to breaking with the rigid metrical forms of the day, Tsvetayeva also developed her own idiosyncratic punctuation—including a reliance on dashes—much like Emily Dickinson, the poet in the English language she most closely resembles.

Unlike Dickinson, however, Tsvetayeva was a public presence—corresponding with Pasternak and Rilke throughout much of her life, writing poems for and about her contemporaries—Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova and Alexander Blok—and finally returning to the Soviet Union in 1939. It was not a triumphant return. She was immediately "suspected" of engaging in anti-Soviet activities. Her daughter Alya was arrested two months after her arrival; her husband Sergei two months later. In 1941, with the coming of World War II, Tsvetayeva was evacuated to Yelabuga where she committed suicide.

The translation of "Poem of the End" presented here by John Dolan attempts to preserve Tsvetayeva's rhythmic innovations and rapid changes in tone and style. There is an uneasy abruptness to this translation that successfully recreates Tsvetayeva's fits and starts. In addition, Dolan has worked to render the poem in more colloquial English—avoiding the awkward moments (e.g., ". . .strangely / too smooth the gesture of / his hat to me") found in other translations. The result is a "Poem of the End" that is easier to read and understand, and closer to Tsvetayeva's original.

—P. MICHAEL CAMPBELL

IN ERASMUS DARWIN'S GENEROUS LIGHT

for Thorpe Feidt

1.
Erasmus Darwin would have agreed with Wilhelm Reich and
Robert Ingersoll,

"Better rot in the windowless tomb
without a door but the worm's red mouth
than wear
the jewelled collar
of a Mental Slave."

He saw how Joys were trampled in the priests' black rounds
twisted by quibbles
of ministers and schools
knotted secure
in the jovial social web commodious
where mystified misery hides
in starspangled gleams of beautified credit
and repo men swing
in Death's tremendous porch.

2.
Such a mouthful. How do you put it?
This way the gnostic garden.
Orgonomic functionalist fields forever.
And will he come again, Christ, sexual habit?

Heavy meat knows no vacuous constraints,
what does a ruling class do when it rules?
Flog it, show me, you unlimited political bookstore.
Honeysuckle, grape, and orange tremolos.
But courage, isn't it available somewhere?
It grows not in rows, but in beauteous blotches,
a gorgeous gallery of gallant inventions.
Don't expect it where you look for it.
It's out of sight.

3.
Fickle, fickle, document time.
False documentation is still documentation.
You idiots. I trace the history of the worship of document
to that social loss we've long ago suffered
you slaves who should know how to get OUT, open your eyes.
If the bishop ever lifted his head for a moment,
looked at Nature, Erasmus Darwin said,
instead of document, text, "nothing but pages,"
he'd have realized he was talking through his episcopal hat.
Why man, you have only to go and look at the High Force
waterfall
not thirty miles from here
to realize it took tens of thousands of years, at very least,
to carve its course through rock. And faces in the rock.
This earth we live on is older than old, in spite of the bishop.
& in spite of the attack on "within" the reductionists mount
within remains within
there's a monkey puzzle tree.
My "spirit of animation"
I don't want to get rid of it,
Erasmus Darwin said.
Within the skull the skill
within the winter dream the whirligig
within within
all & everything :

"Ing" supreme rune and secret song of "Ong."
Forget all derivations,
they dance in happiness,

the early ones down there,
and this isn't myth of origin
or oozing essence origin.
Fuck you, Derrida, Erasmus Darwin said,
origin is beautiful as black
and centers whirl around us as we round them in.

4. *Telluris sacra theoria*

If you consider the sacred theory of the earth,
water below and water above,
the egg cracked and split, the spirit spurting out
flood and ark of sacred origin, waterfall of starry jism
the milk of the stars from her paps
on uplifted ecstatic faces and lovers locked in happy freedom in
their crucible. . .

in my garden, Erasmus Darwin said, blooms
bright surprise galore on bright surprise
and from their volant passion splurge cataracts of eyes.

In the tulgey wood the light consoles
and in the generous light of Erasmus Darwin's ripe exuberance
(and he knew the caves below where sun at midnight shone)
the fields, his very strawberry fields, are Eleusinian.

GEORGE EVANS

FOUR POEMS

REVELATION IN THE MOTHER LODE

I walk into the vineyard at night, into acres of cordoned vines
against their stakes at pruning time, but see, stretching
off through tule fog, only cross marked graves.

How did it come to be that my generation would be stiff
under hoarfrost, and that I should come across them
twenty years after watching them die to remember and feel
I've truly wasted my time, have left no mark upon the earth
in their name, have left only the small craters of a boot
sucking vineyard mud?

And is this guilt, or the product of being swept up
in a time on human earth when few do more than raise
the cause of their own names—and am I one, or is all this
death just sloth which one pretends
to work against the belly of
but which in fact
controls?

You who return to me as vines in the deep night under fog
have come at a bad time, a time when the world is obsessed
with rubbing you smooth, and its concentration
on ceremony brings you to nothing.

Somewhere, mixed in with all the rest I'd meant to get to
which is receding, is a day floating above jungle, flak
exploding in small fists from the trees, rocking
the chopper where I sit in shock and blood and urine
staring into patchwork fields.

I stand behind bamboo shaking, thinking of Nguyet
in a Saigon bar, worried how willingly we forget,
bombs dropping like hair straight down a shadow
a black sheet everything about us muscle hot
prick and resolve and have no idea where I am
but am everywhere and she wobbling on spiked heels
around the bar stools and smoke has everything I cannot
not the least of which is a reason
which makes her more beautiful
than possible, but also quite a bit like the ragged edge
of a ruined wall, and like the crisp brown bamboo leaves
dropping after terrible heat, dripping with an ache I love
which is more for youth than anything certainly not war,
which also feels like dropping.

How tired I am of hearing about that war, which one should
struggle
to keep the nightmare of, suffer from rather than forget.
I don't want to heal, and am sick of those who do.
Such things end in license.

Back here it turns out newspapers and monuments are
taxidermy;
there is little retribution, little learning; what is lost
is forgotten; sometimes it gets so bad I'm not sure
I'm the one who lived. . .then come upon you in a field
—a one-time soldier with a trick knee, flagging humor,
monsoon debt—and find you enfolded by fog as if by spirits,
and become the visage of all that's been thrown from the
world.

NUCLEAR SONNET

Zero zone
zone in hell
substantial nothing death trip zone

the denim, the leather, the smoke
zone
where nothing is written or said which is sensible
sensate zone

incapable of guilt or its brother murder
zone
moving away from description
decision

and the head which fears originality
but lives for its discovery
as if by accident

scrapes its own flesh raw
its own raw flesh

against everything .
.
.
.
Nuclear free ozone zone
neon blue calligraphy of Tokyo zone
wolf zone
purple blood of the heart zone
marble
rock
and ripped off testicle
war
zone

passion color miraculous bandaged birth zone

zone of the heart on fire
of the flaming haired woman

the flaming boned man zone

who mistake these cities for their own

THE MISSING SUNFLOWER

The bombing continues little wooden buildings dissolve
disintegrated from the sky that best frame for spring
and for the willows arching their green canes touching
the ribbon rivers
the cherries pink
smoke rising Nagasaki
and the sunflower melt
curl
turn crisp
collapse
Van Gogh would be pleased it had traveled
and so far but would a man who built a canvas
as much as painted one care if it hung
in a building being its own building own shelter
and dwelling after all
sunlight hitting it
dropping
while Japan itself falls apart
on the plains as on canvas curling and shivering with fire

BOND

She struggles with her baby in the rain water drumming
the buggy hood
dropping a glassy net on her face
her simplicity such strength and focus of motion beauty
and grace
I imagine her naked streaming glistening
with rain as only a man can imagine
or perhaps she is one who prefers
her own and is finished with men relentless love
near the hawthorn tooth in its dark shrub
where she hovers rain bouncing on her watch holding
her arm like a wing
reminding me of my mother who asked one promise
for what she had done: to try to grow old
which centuries later I fell in love and understood

TWO POEMS

ON THE TROPIC OF TIME

There is a moral here.
A moral what? There is a meaning maybe merely
meaning or at-least-fact. There is at least the fantastic
remembrance in its warm noctilucence displaying itself
as the possibility of significance: the pure object
of possible knowledge, a neon anamorph in the black
middle distance, pure as in "only," the only, impure
as memory. But who knows about purity? There was a moment.
I stood childwise on the beach while my brother waded
chest-deep in the darkening, clay-reddened lake. It was not
that, but that the man, having dared me refuse—"You don't
mind,
do you. . ." reached around and stroked my penis. And I was
scared
stiff, as at the petrifying touch. . .not of death
but of the more deadly effect of death's approximation
to my. . .my innocence? Innocence is also a banality. Rather,
my helplessness, and so
I believe I must have been, and probably looking at my brother
the first times he went under. Unclear to me except that at last I
broke
toward him. He clawed me under and I was choked
nearly unconscious with the silty water. Then standing on the
bottom, him furious
on my shoulders, I shoved him to shallow water, to shore,
toward the man. And it is not that we trusted him but that we
had been
entrusted to him, wrongly. Wrongly by my gullible mother. . .
our many scars professing her exquisite taste in men. I can't say

what was lost then, what intended. There is a red, venereal
water
of death, evoked, often opening unprovoked in the perpetuity
of my blameless flesh, my words, in my need to reach
the anamorphic moment. What inevitable sorrow: a human
intelligence:
to try to name or to turn in despair to the idea
of consequence. Who is it who picks up his mother now and is
shocked
to find her light as a feather? Who can follow the tired
slow lineage of wonder, the flesh-on-flesh of which we are the
fact?

ORGANISM AS METAPHOR

Let us unname and so define by pronominal lack
this whole, this only like a body poised in utero
crown testing the rare gulf, pale soles projecting poignancy
upward into eye-colored firmament. Snared? Or seeded? Will
the brain once, ever, in a groin's tight while tell us,
or is it too tick-full, logged with sense, too vertiginous
to let us know in a word, ***manifest?,*** how likeness
became itself the fated fugleman.
We troll
meanwhile along the western bank of the spine. It is
like a river. We attend the action of the telling
rod-tip, angle of line taut against prop-urge, imagining
the deep back of the lure, shad rapalla, its aponeurotic
sheen, glaucous, lake-grey, tastee, tattooed with nervous black
spots
and adrenalized eyes, how it works deep under water,
an adverting fleshiness, a hurt waver, narrative unto them
right out of the heart of Laurie Rapalla, Finnish
progenitor, his hand, wood, and knife working even now
in the spine for the ultimate predator, hooked and hoisted
on his own image. Also:
Maytide. Mulberry's popped white phalanxes

hang over the current. Bush roots snaked tight in the noble
sacrum of America. In cove carp glint out orangish
and spank the surface as they feed on rush roots. On rush tops
red-winged blackbirds curdle the air with a laying song. O
trilliant birds, me not so rare as not to hear in this
paysage a moral: When you meet upon a metaphor
above the Berryman Bridge or below Hannibal, don't
drink it in: expect, S. K. says, obscurity: the river
clear enough at Itasca, has gone bad by Winona
(MN) and at W-eye-nona (MS) each drop has been flushed
dozens of times. And another lesson, cocktail for the analysts:
likening, readers, is pulling real walleye out
of a polluted trope, or not pulling but just trolling
like sun across our own maws, with no inkling
of failure. There is a point. On it a willow
angles out over the river, over a mess of dreaming
blue-gill. They are there and they should bite both burning
buckmoth caterpillar and the dropped mulberry flower.
The shore here is buttressed with debris: a savings and loan
gone belly-up, farmyard, buck and bullhead, too. There is
    something
at this point to be said for saying there is no point in going
on: the shad rap is fouled, forehead red and blistered
from within and without, and without a body
in the boat but ours, an anyhow straggling convention, we
can go onto the beach to cut a spear. Something's to be said too
    for turning
around: we have gone as far as we can go today.

AARON SHURIN

TWO POEMS

ALL THAT

He awoke with a pillow between sex and memory. He sat there, explained neither by substance nor dialectic. He found the red glow, touched a knob: in that second he was middle-aged. Hands outstretched, he began to retrace his steps.

Spirit should walk into that bedroom. In the beginning huge purposes had drawn him into romance, rub his temples through his reason, his tiny red beard. Trees—the young branch-like women and their ears—organs. His small eyes split in two.

He bowed his head with his hands, cafeterias, coffee. The details in which he dwelt subscribed to brochures. His father had come true in the usual way. He forgot why he could hear his own breathing.

The door opened: a bundle of clothes. He snorted, put on his pants, walked to the mirror. A former philosophic system prepared to take charge. We live forever.

SATURATED

Up the ravine the sun was choking with dust. Emotion on the windows from the sideways heat, breathless their heads hang—they've stooped—and went in through the low doorway. On this dark corner table two glasses. His bold cheeks, his full lips— the

ox. He was looking beneath the sunlight; every object was almost cool in the stream. Into his hands his pockets threw their coins.

I found a few words about each; nickname, unmarried, career, places in a mist of obscurity. In our part of the country, no one knew anyone, visited anyone, had money, noticed much. There were puzzling forces, inactive, having iron control. I have met no one else.

He played with his moods like a toy, climbed out of his skin. His gaze softened his lips into flourishes. He grew embarrassed and burst into laughter. All their eyes uncovered his face; far away began to fly into the room.

Like a trembling finger, the path lay across the field. At low tide I saw long wings oblivious of us. Everyone opened, as if silence was his. . .

Talking loudly—splutter up in the air and wave—they kept on repeating, "Come on, come on!"; his face was transfigured across the counter, summoned over to happiness.

I went out; the film of heat hung black over the blue sky. The grass had left behind no wind, against the windowpane wet hair was dancing. New faces had collected in the room. The sky was walking.

JOHN YAU

MEETING THOMAS DANIEL

I first saw a photograph by Thomas Daniel in the spring of 1984 in Winston-Salem, in the office of Ted Potter, the director of the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art. It was a black and white portrait of a man leaning against a clapboard wall, holding a toy gun, and dressed in what looked to me like a silver lamé, Buck Rogers/Marlon Brando biker outfit. Nothing indicated whether this was a costume or everyday clothes. The combination of the clothes, the leaving out of anecdotal information, and the man's ease in the presence of the photographer was what caught my attention. It seemed to me then, and it continues to ring true today, that Daniel was able to use the camera to explore his own tenderness toward the subject. In contrast to Charles Gatewood's photographs of Mardi Gras, Daniel's photograph ("Silver," New Orleans, 1980) did not underscore the "weirdness" of the subject. The camera had not been used to delineate that kind of separation.

Ted told me that he had first seen Daniel's photographs in a regional art exhibition he had juried in West Virginia, and had given him a prize. Later, that afternoon, he showed me a book of photographs Daniel had designed and published in the late '70s. It contained portraits and a few photographs taken in Vietnam during the war. He also gave me Daniel's address and phone number, and urged me to go visit him in Richmond.

After I returned to New York, I wrote to Thomas and told him I had seen one of his photographs, and that I wanted to obtain a copy of his book. A few weeks later, I received the book in the mail, along with a note inviting me to Richmond. Subsequently, we had several conversations on the phone. He told me he was a self-employed, housepainter-photographer, and that he had only been in New York once.

In the spring of 1987, I was asked to be the Critic-in-Residence at the Washington Project for the Arts (WPA). During my six week residency, I got in touch with Thomas and arranged to meet him in Richmond.

We spent the afternoon together (the only time we've ever met) in the modest, white clapboard house he and his family rented on the outskirts of Richmond; at a local bar; and in the studios of two of his friends, who were also Vietnam vets. I learned that he was born and raised in Richmond, and that he had gotten into photography while stationed in Vietnam.

While still in high school, he moved out of his parents' house, and began living in different rooming houses or on the street. Shortly afterward, he had a run-in with the police. It was minor stuff, a prank, but it landed him in court nevertheless. The judge gave him a choice: Enlist or go to jail. After two combat tours (he was, as he put it, afraid he would still have to go to jail if he returned too quickly), he came back to Richmond and enrolled in a local art school. The book he had sent me was printed while he was in college, and it was partially the result of a deal he had worked out with the department chairman. The deal was simple enough; if he could get a decent looking book of his photographs published, he would get his degree. Before offering the deal to the chairman, he had contacted the owners of local printing companies and offered each of them a deal; he would work on the person's house in exchange for the cost of printing a book of photographs.

Thomas showed me work from a number of ongoing projects: portraits of the surviving members of the Daughters of the Confederacy; triptychs of tent revival meetings, river baptisms, and blessings; the members of religious sects involved in the practice of animal sacrifice and snake handling; portraits of people he knew from walking around Richmond.

Daniel doesn't look for meaning. He shows us the meanings various people have settled on, particularly the ones embodying an individual's attitude toward a specific identity or faith. In his triptychs, he stands in two different places on the river's banks to

show us what the minister and the faithful see, and then stands in the water (usually behind the person about to be baptized) to show us the minister and onlookers. He circles around, as well as zeroes in.

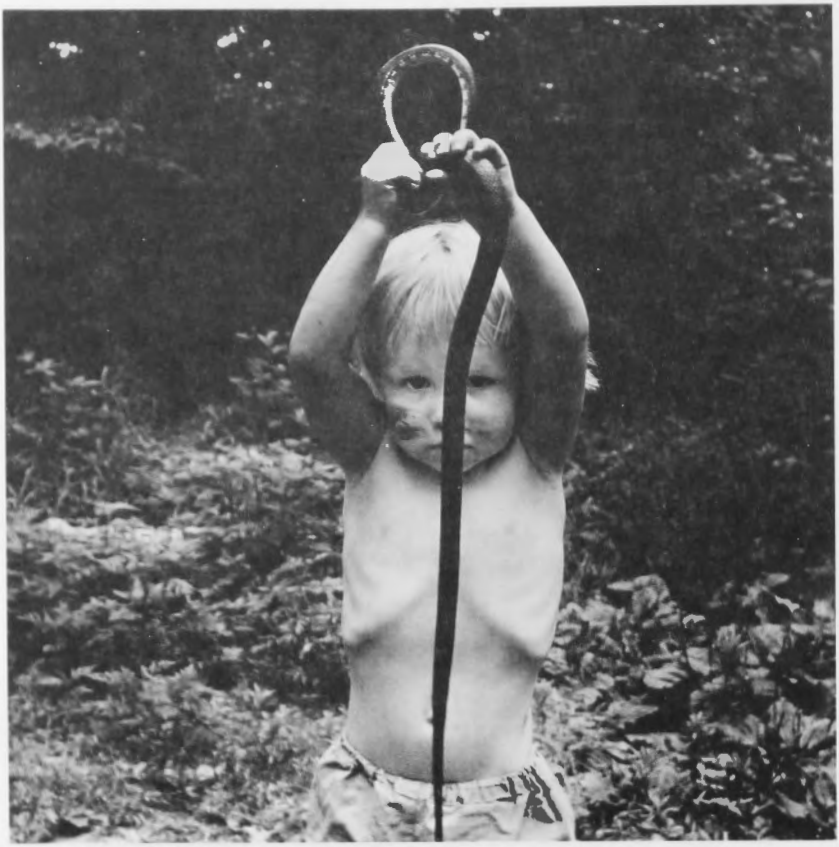
One story from that afternoon stands out in my mind. He had contacted a woman who was a member of the Daughters of the Confederacy, and arranged to go to her house and take a photograph. After he got there, he learned that she had cataracts and was nearly blind. Afraid that the bright lights or a flash might bother her, he asked her to hold a small mirror on her lap, explaining that if the light it reflected onto her face disturbed her, they could stop altogether.

The resulting photographs constitute a portrait of a legacy these women have devoted their lives to sustaining. Now, in their 90s, the women are frail and afraid. Like "Silver," they are not regarded as objects of curiosity. Instead, Thomas Daniel gets them to speak eloquently about the world they maintain, which is part of the one we live in.

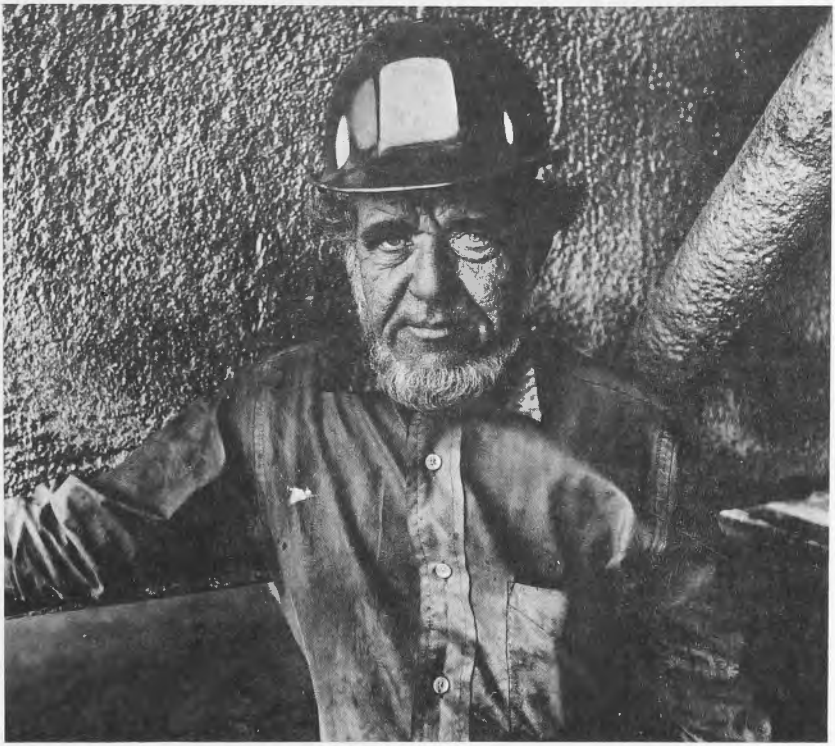
THOMAS DANIEL

SIX PHOTOGRAPHS

"SILVER,"
New Orleans, 1980

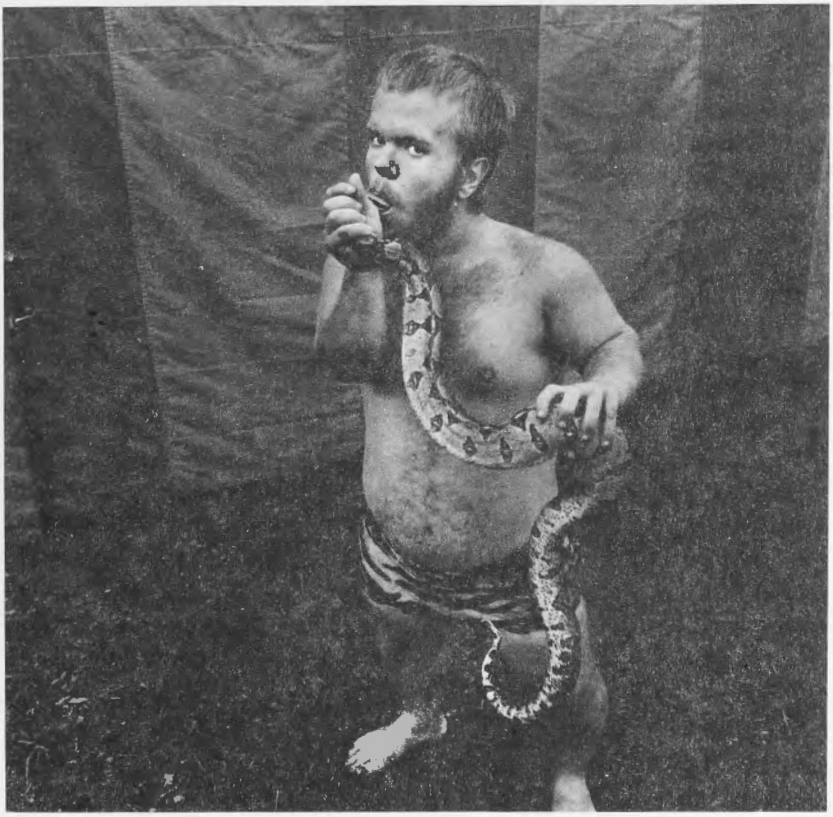


BEE
Ashland, VA, 1985



SHIP BUILDER
Norfolk, VA, 1983

ANIMAL SACRIFICE
Virginia, 1985



MIDGE THE MONSTER HANDLER
Virginia State Fair, 1984

A DAUGHTER OF THE CONFEDERACY
undated

TOM MANDEL

FOUR STRANGE BOOKS

1.

A tract was sealed in the catacomb of cylinders
by three youths called Ejection, Sacrifice,
& Trellis. The treatise speaks to a skeptic
from things still possible.

But what it says will never do. If they reach
toward me I will collapse. Touch me then
my shoulder with strengthened lips; that
man was swallowed!

And spewed up? Accorded a reckoning. Emerged
to prefigure a name. Hippocampus swallowing
the sailor's yarns? Which is known better &
where are they now?

The faithful are only unbelievers delivered
of a refuted inheritance, since jest by
definition is possible, firmly disbelieved,
a swan deducing Leda.

But often I fall into a sleep of discomfort
with the ratios' historicity of storms
and deeply dream incidents whole & pious
oil derricks half-heartedly.

One thing is certain(ly absorbing). The city
is to be destroyed; the inhabitants shall
repent; they have been spared. Reader, stand
back: the Lord's cannon is puny.

Proclaim against the myriad marine life but
he lingers and his son dies; he falls into
paralysis and preaches from a stretcher, until
healed instantly he walks home

to a motif failing to heed; so the message
did not reach the king, and my mother died.
One cannot be too reluctant to believe
in history and in fiction.

God commands the animal to the West to save
an innocent victim of interpretation, uttering
psalms in the animal's midriff. A man could
pray in mortal danger

and be safe without supplication, praising God
in the whale's belly until a resurrection
or an honest narrative invents an instrument
of prophetic salvation.

There is nothing of nomenclature for Spinoza
to believe save vanities, exclusivism.
Oh terminus, even an animal knows the future
is one thing upon our past,

prediction's conditional fate. Alive you learn
reason is always defeated by unerring kooks;
all know the great city was destroyed but
none where it was located.

Forty years is a word; he knows this, he states
it. Fiery clouds hang over the accredited
oracle, and nothing but nothing is diminished.
Here's how it happens.

There are ingenious hypotheses to be sure between
these lines, for those attentive to a puzzle.
Smash down the marred pot, and refashion the
conditional nature of doom.

Merciful formula, frame compassion. If I return
to you, will you not have returned to me?
Is a parable a rebuke, an unmerited favor?
(Glory to your name!)

2.

Wizards have effective dreams.
Unparalleled personae reveal
forgotten colossus cut out
by no human hand, explain that!
Something good for a story.

By the waters of Babylon, who
can interpret originally, o-oh
and then there were three others.
Soon one became a symbol of the
others, some oracular propaganda.

Hew the tree down to its stump
of renewed contingencies. Birds
fly from branches, announcing
a vanished shade, new celestial
promises, open & direct potentates.

A letter is sealed in strange shapes
the promise of bones by right. Once
a sacred tree (well! sacred to someone)
rewriting patriarchal stories and
symbols common among the peoples.

Her palm was intact amid tender grass
of the field afloat in heavenly dew.
The prisoner is gentle, treated gently
or so invented the common man and told
the world's future on a stone.

I am the river, dry in winter.
The tree is low, because it was high.
Not a king of sin or presumption, but
a strong king receives the warning
dream, light scaling to airplanes.

This dress is poisoned, the diadem
burns. I will send one from the
dead to warn. Dogs devoured moon-
light to decipher and boys saw
that writing's truth. Perhaps.

The markers fashioned before they
spoke, bowed before collision.
His master native to the littered
thicket who made obeisance,
was healed and soon scattered.

Stand and be rendered in clay in a
courtyard abroad, a furious image
probably, laughed at or worshipped
without ado; you'll be saved,
martyred, or walked with by an angel.

Disobedient servant, the truth
is impaled on preachers. Explain
your order! A king is not freed
by or from his words; death awaits
any who speak of a renaissance.

Now is the time, the way is wide
and secrets grant a rhythm to
pagan arithmetical tales. Unroll
your fist the stone to paper, a
palm, solid, no other uncontested.

A pseudonym is sound; even an acci-
dent redeems witnessed finality.
The window is open; the roof is

of grass. God does not speak;
he is not silent; he gives a sign.

Remember the meaning of years to come;
fragments preserve mystery, they
speak in dispersion of unity, of
kings of chronology. It is a great
secret and many roads lead there.

3.

One who stood next to me fell.
Public gardens of service
will not replace my companion.

Redolent and susceptible, skeptic
and pious, there is a crowd in
the street, heady, to harangue.

Sheer needless children at first
blush before the days take delight
sane conceits are smoke to disdain

madness and folly; can spring be
far wearisome, sublunar. Think,
squeeze my hand and I'm here.

Death is external, much so indeed
which lights my face. "So what if
he's a prostitute, he's one of God's

children, and I have lots of money
and I'm going to give some to him,
so don't get in my way!"

Only striving to be captive of
an inward rack is absolute soul.
I do not care for mortals,

they are straw; if they scamper
let them bribe me. Like local
wine their gods do not travel,

but end where they start not where
they belong, as even memory like
love and hate dead with meat.

The race is not to the swift
but to the first there, luck ine-
luctable. Shadow does not pass.

A live dog is no good for mortal
man to eat drink and be merry—
Better dead lion than an epitaph.

Do the playthings know the schedule
of events; thought is mortal and
divine, a hidden belonging thing.

Elaborate aqueducts, an artificial
lake fed from a perennial stream.
The date of an inscription is uncertain.

Despair too is appeal to happiness;
to be wise when all are enlightened
you need only be foreign to all that.

4.

There is an ear for every dissonance
a thwarted feast of defence or deliverance.

The self slays providence that plans it.
Parallels bring downfall to these players.

Only the answer is preserved not this solution
but the provoking problem is called tradition.

That risked life after which so many things
it poses merits narration, as of question

are named and in the names we supplicate
two heroes in two plots; only the villain's

still in this triangle, taking his time
to play the trumpet.

By clever chance the cobbler becomes a schemer
to a caliph; the vizier warns the caliph

and the caliph has a daughter and a wife
who is a princess. I have obliged you

on some occasion says the nephew of the
minister to the executioner who will spare

him; hide me in the dungeon where sore
ministers of the past are stored.

Now, the folk tale mirrors life and to
advance merely trip up your chief, it works!

But the reader does not like upstarts.
Oh knave this is a proud Ashkenazi minister!

Eunuchs conspire to lengthen their names, no
more rudimentary motif of bystanders than

imagined ingratitude or an idolatrous image
spreadwinged across the breast still sits

courtierlike on the stone benches of
his ruin. A sleepless king will be amused

by stories of palace intrigue, but intrigue
itself will keep him sleepless.

Downfall and parallel are accidents of conflict.
The victim's cunning is forfeit, no pity.

Here we leave the field of conjectures &
enter a fairyland of guesses, inert in

its embrace or else lose face, proudly
administer insults in a fog of imagination.

The laws observe us and by night and day
do we do what they say? It is open book

pages lying down; that has an irrevocable
ring. What must we rig to circumvent it?

Where you have shoulders rubbing, you have
friction; an author need not labor over

dainties when a fistfight will suffice.
"Long memory goes well with suffering long."

February-April, 1987

TWO POEMS

GETTING WARM

Tingle:
a shaft must be imagined to
connect the motes
though there is no light.

The notes.
If she's quiet
she's concentrating on the spaces
between cries, turning
times into spaces.

Is it memory or physics
that makes the bridge appear?
It looks nothing
like a real bridge.
She has to finish it
so it can explode.

She is in the dark,
sewing, stringing holes together
with invisible thread.
That's a feminine accomplishment:
a feat of memory, a managed
repletion or resplendence.

ATTENTION

Ventriloquy
is the mother tongue.

Can you colonize rejection
by phrasing your request,
"Me want?"

Song: "I'm not a baby.
Wa, Wa, Wa.

I'm not a baby.
Wa, Wa, Wa.

I'm crazy
like you."

The "you"
in the heart of
molecule and ridicule.

Marks resembling
the holes

in dead leaves
define the thing (moth wing).

That flutter
of indifference,
feigned?

But if lapses
are the dens

strategy aims
to conceal,

then you don't know
what you're asking.

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

from TRIPMASTER MONKEY: HIS FAKE BOOK

The folks are going to love her, thought Wittman. Ruby and Zeppelin are really going to love her.

Ruby Ah Sing, Wittman's mother, had a maple tree, the crown-leaves gold and red now. The crowns of many kings on a hat-rack. The pear tree had some pears, and green leaves, and dead black leaves on long offshoots, and flowers. Wild in the time machine.

Through the screen door—the crack clack crash of mah jong. The son of the house would have turned about but for the girl he was with. Always do the harder thing. He opened the door, went ahead, held it for Taña.

Ruby screamed. "Eeek!" Stood up and screamed again, pointing. And Auntie Sadie screamed, and Auntie Marleese ran to him. His mother eeked him again. "Eeek!" What's wrong? The White girl? A hobo followed them inside? "What have you done to yourself?!" She put her hands to her cheeks.

"You used to be such a beautiful boy!" shouted Auntie Marleese, looking up at him.

"Too much hair," said Auntie Sadie. "Much too hairy."

"You go shave," said Mother. "Shave it off! Shave it off! Oh, hock geen nay say!" That is, "Scares you to death!" "Gik say nay!" That is, "Irks you to death!" "Galls you to death!" Clack! Clack!

"No act, Ma," he said.

"Don't say hello to your mother," she said.

"Sticks and stones, honey boy," said Auntie Bessie. "Never you mind. Have a heart, Ruby."

A dog jumped on him. "Down, Queenie. Behave," said Auntie Jadine, its owner. "Where you manners, Queenie." Those who usually spoke Chinese talked to the yapperdog in English. "Down, Queenie. Come heah." They spoke English to him and to the dog. American animals.

"GOOD dog," said Wittman. It mind-fucks dogs to be called good when they're trying to be fierce.

"Wit Man come to see his momma," explained the aunties, one to another. "Good boy. Big boy now." Clack clack clack. A racket of clack clack clack. "All grow up. College grad, haw, Wit Man?" Nobody asked if he were a doctor or an engineer yet. How tactful. Not asking about work at all. "Sit. Sit. Sit." Taña got a side chair at one of the dining tables.

"Oh, I be so sorry I didn't recognize you, Wit Man," said Auntie Sadie. "You so changed."

"That's okay, Auntie Sadie."

"Come talk to your Aunt Lilah."

"Hello, Aunt Lilah. Hello, Auntie Dolly," said Wittman. "Hello, Aunt Peggy." He went to each auntie, shaking hands with some, kneeling beside this one and that one for her to take a better look at him. "He was a cute biby." "Why you not visit Auntie more often?" "Me too, honey boy. Visit you Aunt Sondra too."

The ladies at his mother's table were comforting her. "Hairy face, fashion on a plate," said Auntie Sophie. "You the one sent him to college, Ruby." Clack. Clack.

"Where I go wrong, I ask you," said Wittman's mother. "He was clean cut. He used to be soo mun." That is, "He used to be soigné." "Kay ho soo kay ge ba, neh. Gum soo. Soo doc jai." That is, "He takes a lot after his father, neh. So like. Too alike." "Moong chả cha. Both of them, father and son, moong cha cha."

"In Hong Kong now, they say m.c.c.," said Auntie Peggy, who was up on the latest.

"M.c.c." "M.c.c." The aunties tried the new Hong Kong slang. "Moong cha cha" means "spacey," spaced out and having to grope like a blindman.

Meanwhile, at Taña's table, Aunt Dolly, who was sophisticated, was saying, "What's your name, honey? Tan-ah. What a pretty name. Russian? Do you play, Tan-ah? I'll show you how to play. This is a very famous Chinese game. Mah jong. Can you say 'mah jong'?" Auntie Dolly had been a show girl in New York, and knew how to endear herself to foreigners. She did introductions. Good. Wittman did not want to announce Taña to the room, and he was not about to table-hop with her like a wedding couple.

"That's Madame S.Y. Chin. This is Madame Gordon Fong." Et-cetera. "Hello," said Taña. Well, you can't expect her to say, "How do you do, Madame." And if she said, "How do you do, Mrs.," there's been a demotion. Madame. Shit. Madame Chiang Kai Shek. Madame Sun Yat Sen. Mesdames Charles Jones Soong and T.V. Soong. Madame Nhu. All the cookbook ladies are madames too. And all the restaurant guys are generals. Generalissimo. "Let me show you how to play, honey." Don't trust anybody who calls you honey, Taña. It's a verbal tic.

"My name is Maydene Lam," said Auntie Maydene. "Call me Maydene, dear."

"How do you do, Maydene."

"I've always liked your name," said Auntie Lily Rose. "Such a pretty stage name. Maydene Lam."

"Isn't it delicious? There are four little girls named after me in the Valley." Clickity clackity.

"What beautiful hair you have, Tan-ah. She's gorgeous, Wit Man. You are so fair. Isn't she fair?"

"Thank you," said Taña, who should learn to return compliments.

Every auntie had jet-black dyed hair. Why do women as they get older have to have fixed hair? Because of beauty fixed at 1945. These were the glamour girls of World War II. Taking after the Soong sisters and Anna Chennault, who married guys in uniform. Whenever the aunties' pictures appeared in the papers—Chinese or English—they were identified as "the lovely Madame Houston W. P. Fong," "the beauteous Madame Johnny Tom." They were professional beauties. Quite a few of them had been Wongettes—"Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Eddie Pond proudly welcomes to the Kubla Khan the beautiful Wongettes, Chinese Blondes in a Blue Mood." "Myself, I am a blonde at heart," said Auntie Dolly. Don't you look askance at her, Taña, with your sanpaku eyes, or else I'm getting a divorce.

"Ciao!" "Poong!" "Kong!" Action. "Eight ten thousands!" "Mah jong!" Clack! Crash! "Mah jong!" He stood behind his mother to look at her winning hand.

"Talk to See Nigh here," said his mother.

"You enjoying the game, See Nigh?" he said to the lady whom he had never met before.

"Oh, how well-behaved," said the See Nigh, the Lady. "So doc-yee. And such good manners. Most boys with beards are bum-how. He doesn't have to call me See Nigh. You call me Auntie, Wit Man."

His mother spoke sotto voce, in Chinese, "Who's the girl?"

"My friend. A good friend," he said in English. One shouldn't speak a foreign language in front of people who don't understand it, especially when talking about them. Don't add to the paranoia level of the Universe.

"Serious?"

"Sure."

"How serious?"

"Serious, okay?"

Gary Snyder had gone to Japan to meditate for years, and could now spend five minutes in the same room with his mother. Beat his record.

"So you walk with her," said Auntie Sophie. She was translating "go with." She meant "So you go with her."

"Mixing with girls," teased Auntie Marleese. "Old enough to mix the girls." Go after girls with an eggbeater.

"She's so rude, she's not talking to me," said Mom. "She's hurt my feelings, Wit Man."

"Introduce you gal to you mama, young man," said Auntie Sophie. Clack!

"Hey, Taña," he called over to her table. "Meet my mother, Ruby Ah Sing. Ma, meet my pahng yow, Tan-ah." "Pahng yow" means "friend"; maybe Taña would think it meant "wife."

"Hi." Taña waved. Click.

"You aren't growing up to be a heartbreakin' man, are you, honey boy?" said Aunt Lilah.

"Speak for your own self," said back-talking Wittman. Clack! Clack! She was a seventy-year-old glamour girl who was having a *ro*mance with a fifty-five-year-old married lover. They saw each other Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights. Whenever you're tête-à-tête with her, she reveals, "My beloved is a sai-yun." A "western man," which isn't correct; we're westerners too. "He is offering to divorce his wife for me, but I don't want to be married. Three times a week is quite enough."

"U.C., state-run public school, don't teach them to present themselves socially," explained Auntie Jean, an authority on higher education, a son at Harvard, a daughter at Wellesley, where the Soong sister who married Sun Yat Sen went, another son at Princeton, the baby daughter at Sarah Lawrence. "As I said to Mayling Soong, I-vee Leak be A-number-one all-around. They learn how to make money, and they learn to go around in society." The cruel thing to say back to her is: "What eating club does Ranceford belong to?" But you don't want to be mean to her. They will graduate, and never come back.

"At U.C., this one learned: grow hair long," Mom agreed. "And go out with bok gwai noi." As if dating las gringas wasn't his idea, he had to be taught. "You ought to see them there in Berkeley. Doi doi jek. Yut doi, yow yut doi." Pair after pair (of mixed couples). "Jek," an article used with livestock. "Doi," an article used with poultry. "You meet my Wit Man too late, See Nigh. You missed out on one good-looking boy."

"You still got one matinée idol under the hair, Ruby," said Aunt Marleese. "Cut it for your poor mother, Wit Man. I remember when you were yay high. I used to change his diapers. You were deh, Wit Man. He was so deh." Click click. She gave them an example of deh, her head to one side, a finger to her dimple, coy lady pose. The aunties smiled at him like he was going to act deh any moment for his mother at least. To act deh means you do baby talk, act babyish, and bring out motherly love.

"Cut it off, Witt Man," said his mother. "Cut it off. Give me some slack."

All this time at four tables, outspread fingers with red nails and rings of gold and jade pushed and turned the tiles in wheels of bones and plastic, clockwise and counterclockwise. The sound of fortune is clack clack clack. They built little Great Walls, and tore them down. Crash! "I'm the prevailing east wind." Aunt Lily Rose is dealing. "You in luck today, Maydene." "Not luck like you, Dolly." "Poong!" "I've got a hot one," said Mom, fanning a tile like she were putting out a match. "Dangerous. Dangerous." She's got a red dragon. "Aiya." "The wind shifts to the west." "Here comes the green dragon." "The white dragon." "A hot one." "Four circles. Kong!" "Ciao!" shouted Wittman's mother, pouncing on the tile

that the See Nigh had discarded. "One, two / three bamboo!" "Mah jeuk birds all in a row." (Is "mah jong" a white word, then, like "chop suey," a white food?) "Your mama, one cutthroat," said Auntie Sophie. "You working hard, Wit Man?"

"I've been fired." Let 'em have it.

"Fired!" His mother screamed. "Fired! Fired!"

"It's okay, Ma. I didn't like the job anyway."

"Four years college." Mom put down her tiles. She shut her eyes, a mother defeated. She's an actress. She's acting. You can't trust actors, feel one thing and act another. She put her hand on her brow. Chewed the scenery. "What are we to do?"

The chorus gals snowed her with more comfort. "He'll get a job again, Ruby." "Nowadays they try out jobs, then settle down." "Wit Man be smart. He'll be rich one of these days."

"He read books when he was three years old. Now look at him. A bum-how."

"Don't you worry. He's one good boy." "He be nice and tall." "He always has beautiful gal friends." "He'll turn out for the better."

He should shut them up with Rilke: *It will be difficult to persuade me that the story of the Prodigal Son is not the legend of him who did not want to be loved. When he was a child, everybody in the house loved him. He grew up knowing nothing else and came to feel at home in their softness of heart, when he was a child.*

But as a boy he sought to lay aside such habits. He could not have put it into words, but when he wandered about outside all day and did not even want to have the dogs along, it was because they too loved him; because in their glances there was observation and sympathy, expectancy and solicitude; because even in their presence one could do nothing without gladdening or giving pain . . . .But then comes the worst. They take him by the hands, they draw him toward the table, and all of them, as many as are present, stretch inquisitively into the lamplight. They have the best of it; they keep in the shadow, while on him alone falls, with the light, all the shame of having a face.

. . .No, he will go away. For example, while they are all busy setting out on his birthday table those badly conceived gifts meant, once again, to compensate for everything. Go away for ever.

O, King of Monkeys, help me in this Land of Women.

"And so-o-o much talent, too-o much talent." "He got upbringing, Ruby; you gave him upbringing he cannot lose." "He got foundation." "You one good mother." "He's clean too. Most beardies are dirty." Clackety clack clack. "And such good grades. Remember his report cards?" "He was so cute. Do you still have docyee knees, honey boy? You have got to tap-dance for your Aunt Lilah again."

His mom was getting cheered up, and felt free to brag. "Three years old, he made five dollars reading. His father bet a bok gwai lawyer that our biby could read anything. They took the biggest book down from the shelf. He read perfect. 'He's been coached on that book,' said the lawyer, and gave him money to run and buy a brand-new *Wall Street Journal.* He read the editorial. He won five dollars. We let him keep it. Does he eat regular?" she asked Taña.

"Sure. He eats." Clack!

Does a mother, even an artiste mother who led a free youth, and chose her own husband, does such a mother want her son to have a free artistic life? No. Rimbaud wanted his kids to be engineers.

"You need a job?" asked Auntie Mabel. "I got one gig for you, dear. You come to Florida with me, and do my revue."

"You still doing your revue, Auntie May-bo?"

"Yeah, I do revue. You come, eh, Wit Man. We need a fella in the act."

"In Florida, you dance? You sing?"

"No-o-o. I stand-up comedy. My gals dance and sing. I train them. Miss Chinatown 1959, 1962 and 1963—all in my act." She liked breasts and balls jokes. The punchline: "One hung low. Ha ha." Miss Mabel Foo Yee, the Fortune Kookie. You had to hand it to her, though. Women aren't funny, and she's still cooking. Cook dinnah, Auntie May-bo. She herself had won beauty contests umpteen years ago. And went on to fan-dance, almost top billing with Miss Toyette Mar, the Chinese Sophie Tucker, and Mr. Stanley Toy, the Fred Astaire of Chinatown, and Prince Gum Low, and Mr. Kwan Tak Hong, the Chinese Will Rogers, who also danced flamenco. Wittman had seen Auntie May-bo topless at Andy Wong's Sky Room. The first tits he'd ever seen, scared the daylights out of him. A blare of brass and a red spotlight—Aunt

Mabel had slinked about the Skyroom, snaking her arms and legs like Greta Garbo and Anna Mae Wong, legs tangoing out of her slit dress. The light shrank to head-size, and the spot held her face. Chopsticks in her hair. False eyelashes blinked hard, and the light went out. She ran about with incense sticks, writing red script in the dark. Red lights flashed on. The front of her dress broke away. Gong. Gong. Lights out. Gong. Lights on. Auntie Mabel stood with arms and naked tits raised at the ceiling. You looked hard for two seconds, the lights went out. Gong. Lights on—she was kneeling with wrists together, tits at ease, eyelashes downcast. Lights out, climactic band music, the end.

She was saying, "All my gals queen of prom, court princess at least. I teach them. Mothers of junior high gals say to me, 'Start her on her make-up, May-bo.' I teach them hair and dress. They do not go out in blue jeans or with no gloves." Wittman had met some of these trained gals. They looked like young Aunt Mabels. They wore their hair in beehives with a sausage curl or two that hung down over the shoulder. Today Aunt Mabel had on one of her specially ordered Hong Kong dresses. The mandarin collar was frogged tight, but there was a diamond-shaped opening that showed her lace underwear and her old cleavage. Her old thigh flirted through a side slit. There was a lot of perfume in the room, My Sin, Chanel No. 5, Arpège, most of it coming from her. To their crędit, no girl of Wittman's college generation would be caught dead in Chinese drag.

"Good you get fired from demeaning employment. You get back into show biz, honey. For you, Aunt Carmen has special ten percent," said Aunt Carmen, a theatrical agent. She sometimes charged twenty percent, twice as much as the regular (white) agents. Her clients, Chinese and Japanese types, who'd gotten SAG cards from "Flower Drum Song" and SEG cards from "Duel in the Sun," and hopeful ever since, were hard to place. The go-between (white) agent, had to make his ten percent too. The actors didn't ask how come these double agents weren't getting 5%-5%. She was up from L.A. to touch base with the talent in the Bay Area and Seattle, and the home folks in the Valley. She had a corner on the West Coast talent. (Auntie Goldie Joy of Manhattan handled the East Coast. The two of them had helped book S.I. Hsiung and

his all-Caucasian Chinese opera, starring Harpo Marx and Alexander Woolcott, into theatres in San Francisco and London and New York.)

"You a good type, Wit Man," said Auntie Carmen. "Your gal a good type too. You an actress, darling? Lose ten pounds, you be one actress."

"No, I'm not," said Taña. "I'm an assistant claims adjuster." Why won't she tell them she's a painter?

"We need a man in the act, Wit Man," said Auntie Mabel. "You be interested, huh." Local boys don't wear tights, so Wittman had been the boy brought in from out of town to play the Prince. "You were a natural, such good ideas. You wore your underpants outside your regular pants, like comic book superheroes, you said. You have good personality, Wit Man." There was a song that went, "Walk personality, talk personality." "Come on. Sometime we play Reno. North Shore Lake Tahoe."

"Auntie Mabel, I like do Shakespeare."

"You snob, Wit Man. You will be hurt and jobless. We have one elegant act. High class educated gals." Yeah, like Patty (Schoolteacher) White, the stripper in—and out of—cap and gown and eyeglasses. She was showing that you make more money working North Beach than the School District, and you get more appreciation too.

"You join Auntie Mabel's revue," said Mom, "you meet prettier gals." Clack! Putting the girlfriend in her place.

"Come on, honey boy," called Auntie Bessie. "Tap-dance for us. You the cutest most doc-yee fatcheeks." They remember, he had taken classes in Good Manners and Tap Dance at Charlie Low's school. Eddie Pond of the Kubla Khan had also sponsored schools, and given to his community his expertise in engineering, insurance, real estate, and law. The showmen competed to be most socially responsible.

"No, thanks, Auntie Bessie."

Aunt Bessie sang, "'I won't dance. Don't ask me. I won't dance. Don't ask me. I won't dance, monsieur, with yo-o-ou.'"

"Hey, Auntie Bessie, do you still say Yow?" She had played Laurie in the Chinese Optimist Club production of "Oklahoma." And sang and danced in all the best Big City clubs—Eddie Pond's

Kubla Khan, Charlie Low's Forbidden City, Fong Wan the Herbalist's, Andy Wong's Chinese Sky Room. "'Okla-, Okla-, Okla-,'" he said to start her off.

"'And when we sa-a-ay Yow!'" sang Aunt Bessie. "'Yow! A yip I oh I ay! we're only saying you're doing fine, Oklahoma. Oklahoma, okay.'" She had worn a white lace Laurie dress with a half-dozen petticoats, and supplemented her hair with a wig of black ringlets. "'Don't sigh and gaze at me. Your sighs are so like mine. Don't throw bo-kays at me. . . .Don't please my folks too much. Don't laugh at my jokes too much. ('Who's laughing at your jokes?'). . .People will say we're in love.'" He had fallen in love with her himself. She'd kept her stage make-up on for the cast party. He had stood beside her at the community sing around the piano, and saw her powdery wrinkles. Offstage, she sang and smoked at once.

"I know a girl who would like your boy," said the See Nigh, who didn't speak English. "She came from Hong Kong only a month ago, and already she has a job. Her sponsor uses influence, and her papers are legal. She's a very good old-fashioned, traditional girl. Not in this country long enough to be spoiled. She'll make a good wife."

"Listen to See Nigh, Wit Man," said Mother. "A Chinese girl like that doesn't like beards. You be one beatnik, you scare her away. You be clean-cut All American Ivy Leak boy, okay?"

"I've got a daughter I hope she won't marry somebody second-rate," said Auntie Marleese. "Gail is so smart, professors gave her a personal invitation to attend Stanford University, and pay her to go there. You know S.A.T.? Best S.A.T. in California. Ten thousand points. Pre-med. Her teachers tell me that they never taught a more intelligent girl."

"You still not get Gail married yet?" said Auntie Doll. Clack! The chorus girls had been young when it was smart to be catty.

"My Betty," said Auntie Lily Rose, "will be a teacher of teachers. She's major in Education and Dec Art and Child Development."

Wittman ought to say, "Bring me your daughters. I'll talk to them with my hom sup mouth and touch them with my hom sup hands. Hom sup sup." A hom sup lo is a salty drippy pervert. "Hungry, Ma," he said. "What's there to eat?"

"Go eat," said Mother. "So help yourself. Sow mahng mahng." "Mahng mahng" is the sound of being skinny. "Fai dut dut" and "fai doot doot" are the sounds of being fat. "Eat. Eat. Don't wait for us."

Wittman grabbed Taña's hand, and beat it to the kitchen.

There were cartons and covered dishes on every surface, more warming in the oven, and more cooling in the refrigerator. They loaded their plates. The cartons came from the restaurants which some aunties owned and some hostessed, queens of night-life. When you're out on the town, your rep for setting it on fire, depends on them, treating you and your gal right. Also, when an actor loses his will to audition, they give him a meal on the house. The food in cartons was courtesy of the chefs, letting themselves go, back-home-cooking that they don't do for the customers.

Taña has sanpaku eyes all right, looking at me and everything out of them like it's the end of the world. If she says "dragon ladies," definitely divorce. Not one of the aunties nor Mother mentioned that Wittman's new girl has a sanpaku gwut. Maybe they didn't want to upset Auntie Dolly, who also has one. Or it's only Japanese who have a thing about the iris U'd with eyewhite. Judy Garland has gwutting eyes, and John Lennon has them. Elvis and James Dean and Brando lower their heads and look up, acting like they have them. Over her chow mein, she's feyly giving me lots of eyewhite.

"Your mother reminds me of my mother," she said. "I'm on my way out the door, and she says right in front of my date, and our double-dates, 'Are you wearing your bra? Get upstairs, young lady, and put on a brassiere. You're too big to be going out all over town without a bra.' Everybody's mother does that."

"You don't have to be so understanding. My mother's vicious. You don't know her. She's worse than you think. She's capable of tragedy."

"What's so tragic about playing mah jong?"

"Women who don't have anything better to do but sit around all day playing mah jong are waiting to die. Their lives are over. They used to have work that they loved. Taña, you'll never meet people who love working unless they're in show business. The highpoint of their lives was when they did shows for war. They bought an airplane. They painted across it, 'California Society to

Rescue China.' Auntie Bessie's brother flew it to Canton. He became a Flying Tiger and is now a pilot for China Airlines. Mom and the aunties used their beauty to get this country to go to war—go to the rescue of people who looked, for example, like themselves. To this day the old fut judges vote for the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. who most reminds them of these ladies. Their chapter of the Association of Vaudeville Artistes paraded the U.S. to stop selling scrap iron to Japan. At the War Bond shows, they performed their last, then the theater died. I have to make a theater for them. I don't want them to wait for a next war."

"I don't think they're wasting their time dying for the next war. They're not so old. Your mother and Lily Rose and Peggy—a lot of them are still pretty."

"Yeah, watch for them on the late show. Peggy played Anna May Wong's maid, when Anna May Wong wasn't playing the maid herself. Lily Rose, under her stage name, played one of Barbara Stanwyck's maids in 'The Bitter Tea of General Yin.' Want to meet a nice member of my family? I have a granny. She hates mah jong. She's not invited to the front room. Why don't we bring her some food?"

They carried plates and bowls to the back of the house, where he called at a door, "PoPo, tadaima-a-a," Japanese. No little old lady voice answered, "Okaerinasai." She had taught him more phrases than that, but when he tried them out on Japanese speakers, they didn't seem to mean anything. She spoke a language of her own, or she was holding on to a language that was once spoken somewhere, or she was more senile than she appeared. Wittman opened the door, but no little old pipe-smoking lady there. They put the dishes on her coffee table, and sat on her settee and her footstool. The room was webbed with lace that she tatted from string. The light made shadow webs, everything woofing and wefting in circles and spirals, daisies, snowflakes, the feather eyes of white peacocks. Well, if you're going to be a stringsaver, you can do better than roll it up into a ball. He opened the windows and started the room buoying and drifting.

GrandMaMa owned a phonograph but mostly Cantonese opera and "Let's Learn English" records. There were pictures of baby Wittman in his costumes—sumo wrestler, Injun with fringe, opera

monkey. Pictures of aunties shaking hands with F.D.R. and Truman. A woman—Jade Snow Wong?—christening a liberty ship at the Marin Shipyards. The thermos of hot water sat next to tea glasses, which were jelly glasses caked with what looked like dry dirt. "Want some tea?" Wittman offered. "It's supposed to look like that. You're supposed to let the tea residue keep accumulating." Against the day when you can't afford tea leaves? So when you drink water, it zenly reminds you of tea? "Like a wooden salad bowl," he explained.

"No, thanks anyway," she said, which was all right. He didn't want a girl who would gulp it right down saying, "How interesting. How Zen. Say something Chinese."

They sat quiet. He did not turn on the t.v. to watch some Sunday sport. He hoped that Taña did not picture his grandmother as some old bride—Miss Havisham—or a spider woman. They lit up smokes. He hadn't smoked in front of Mom, who would've said, "Quit, you. You quit."

"Your grandmother's in show business too." Taña was looking at the memory village on the dresser. It did look like a stage designer's model for a set. The houses had common walls, and a row would look like a railroad flat of New York, like a shotgun apartment of the Southwest if there were doors from home to home. The rows were separated by alleys, labeled as streets. Two of the houses had thatch stick roofs that opened up; ladders led to lofts. The rungs were numbered; the adobe steps with only two risers were also numbered, one, two. One of the houses had a brick stove; the next-door had two stoves. Toy pigs, numbered, lived inside the houses and walked in the alleys. The rich man's house had a larger courtyard and more wings than the others, plus flowered tiles, and parades or boatloads of people and animals atop the horn-curved eaves. In the plaza was a well, and beside the well (where PoPo had fetched water) was the temple (where the men whistled at her and made remarks, and she dropped and broke her water jar, and the men laughed). Away from the houses was the largest building, the music building for the storage and playing of drums and horns. There were numbers on the lanes and paths out to the fields. It was autumn; the fields were shades of gold. One of the fields was edged with thirty-three lichee trees.

"Twenty of those trees belonged to my great-great uncle," said Wittman, "and three of them belonged to my great grandfather. He didn't plant them or ever see them. He sent the money to grow them; some autumns his family thought of him, and mailed him dried lichee. Near harvest time, the boys, my cousins far removed, stayed awake nights guarding the trees with a loaded gun." A bridge went over a stream. Above the rice fields was a pumpkin patch and a graveyard. "The reason you'll find a lot of us who don't like Hallowe'en or pumpkin pie is that pumpkins were the only food that hardly ever failed. Like your Irish potatoes. People's skin turned orange from eating nothing but pumpkins. Slanty-eyed jack-o-lanterns. I used to run Crackerjack cars on the paths, and boats on the rivers. Should the I.N.S.—Immigration—raid this room, looking for illegals, they can take this model as evidence, and deport our asses. Everybody who claimed to have come from here studied this model, and described it to Immigration. It is not a model *of* anything, do you understand? It's a memory village." He slid the model onto his open hand and held it like a birthday cake. "This is it. My land. I am a genie who's escaped from the bottle city of Kandor. I have told you immigration secrets. You can blackmail me. And make me small again, and stopper me up. But if I don't have a friend to tell them to, where am I?"

"Oh, come on. Immigration can't deport you. I'm not going to blackmail you."

"I'm trusting you with my life, Taña, and my grandma's life." But he was holding out on her. In that Gold Mountain trunk was the cheat sheet, a scroll like a roll of toilet paper with questions and answers about the people and the pigs who lived in those houses. Nobody had destroyed the scroll or the memory village. Wonder why.

"This room smells like a grandma's room," said Taña. "I have two grandmas, and their houses smell like this. Tell me when I get the old lady smell, Wittman. Or do they use a powder that's out of fashion? Orrisroot, lavender."

"Salonpas. The old lady who lives here may not be my grandmother. She showed up one day, and we took her in. I've tested her for her background: I watched for her to hurt herself, and heard what she said for 'Ouch!' She says, 'Bachigataru.' Japanese.

At New Year's, she doesn't go to the Post Office to have her green card renewed, so either she's an illegal alien or she's a regular citizen. The night she showed up she brought news about relatives that we shouldn't have lost touch with. My parents acted like they understood her, 'Yes, the cousins.' 'Of course, the village.' 'Yes, three ferries west of the city, there live cousins and village cousins. Anybody knows that.' They didn't let on that they'd lost their Chinese. You want to know another secret? She may be my father's other wife, and they're putting one over on my mom. Not to get it on sexually, she's old, but so that my mom will take care of her." The strange old lady used to pull her apron to her back, a cape, and hang a 24-carat gold medallion to her front, a breastplate, and belted herself with a 24-carat gold buckle shield. She waved fans of dollar bills. She danced, she said, whirlygiggly the way they danced where she came from. They'd be guilty should they turn her away.

He wandered in back of her shoji screens, opened her closet, walked into her bathroom. No grandma dead or alive. Her long pipe was gone; her shoes were nowhere to be found. In the medicine cabinet was his grandfather's safety razor. He wet his moustache and beard, soaped up, and shaved his face clean. "That ought to freak my mother out," he said. "How do I look?"

"You look better," said Taña. So why is she looking at herself in the mirror instead? She ought to be touching and kissing his nude face.

"My mom hasn't seen my face for awhile. I'm going to give her a break. She's my mother, after all, and has a right to see her son's face."

"On the way through the kitchen, the good son scraped the dishes and put them in the sink to soak.

"Gotta go, Ma. Where's PoPo?"

"Out."

"Where?"

"To the Joang Wah to see a movie."

"I'll go pick her up, give her a car ride back." Leave home, come back visit, give the old folks a ride.

"No need. She'll get a car ride."

"I'll pick her up anyway."

"She may not be there. She does errands."

"She's not in an old age home, is she, Ma? You didn't dump her? She's not dead?" said in front to the aunties, who were all ears.

"She's alive. Strike *you* dead for saying such a thing."

"She isn't really at the movies. Where is she?"

"Wit Man, I have taken good care of her for twenty years." Arranging her tiles. Gin.

"Ruby took in a poor stranger lady, and gave her food and a home," said Aunt Lilah.

"The money you spent on her," said Auntie Jadine, "you sacrificed your own pleasures." Her comrades were helping Mom out giving her back-up because there were certain aunties present you needed to let everyone know that they were against bringing a grandma over from China to do the housework. They had not either talked their old lady into signing her Hong Kong building over to them, and selling it to pay for her upkeep in America.

"And I taught her a skill," said Ma. "She can run wardrobe anywhere." Grandma had earned her keep, mending costumes, ironing, sleeping in dressing rooms as dark-night security watchwoman.

"Oh, you're too kind, Ruby." "Ruby has a big heart. Bighearted Ruby—what they call you behind your back."

"Okay, Ma," said Wittman. "Where is she?"

"Your father has her."

"He took her camping?"

"He has to take care of her too. She's from *his* side."

He walked to the door. "She's too old to camp. I'm going to bring her back."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Ah Sing," said Taña. "Thank you for the delicious luncheon. Good-bye, everybody."

"I took responsibility long enough." Her voice and clacking followed her son out to the porch and gate and street. "You find her, you the one responsible."

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER

THREE POEMS

DISAPPOINTMENT

A faint smell of urine
embroidering that bouquet of mold the big cushions
give off days the fog won't lift,

and a shelf of bone
growing out over the eyelids like evening's shadow
across a field of corn—

The whole parade
leaking out from your shoulders, bequeathing
to the groin a pang of distance;

then that metallic taste in the mouth
and a voice you had let yourself believe
was dead

close now by your ear, intimate and sweet:

Well, well, well,
look what we have here.

BEFORE WINTER, PART II

Peaches on top of the compost, sitting pretty
rot from underneath blue

-jays swoop
down for poppy seed then curl
back up to the fence post
because cat
he's got a lot of tricks, funny
angles and spots
he'll come out at you from

if a peach hasn't
brained him yet the way the fool
sleeps chin to dirt
right underneath the damn tree's
big fat peaches too hard
and no good to eat, rotting from the bottom up
nematodes, sow bugs
larvaemites & spores slap-
happy, feasting on sugar

cook the heap of pith, stalk and leaf
so cat'll sleep warm
between rosemary and the nasturtium
drinking nitrogen
at its base hoping mice or crickets or
some kind of electric
shifts an ion on his whisker
opening one eye as snails both sides
of him, above and below

lay their trails down in the night

SUNSET IN CHINATOWN

The massive cable turns on its spool, pulling
carloads of tourists to the city's crest

as the sun sits low
in the hills above Chinatown, exploding

suddenly in the window of Goey Loy Meats, high
along the top of the glass,

showering light over barbecued ducks—

a somehow elegiac splash
this evening, the last week before Labor Day

as if summer, in tandem with the sun,
were being pulled down

and away from us by the great spool's turning.

Thus, the sullen old man in his Mao cap
plucks the zither for change

on a crate outside the geegaw shop:

first, the ancient *Song of Cascading Water,*
followed by the plaintive
Lament of the Empress Ch'ou

and even the bad little boy from Wichita Falls
trailing behind his parents in a sulk

registers that twinge

birds in the sky, insects and beasts no less
than the Immortals

feel

when the plangent notes take shape in the air,
aligning their souls with Heaven and Earth.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

PERORATION FOR A LOST TOWN

[May 1988]: "On this road thou camest. . ."

1

what will I tell you sweet town?
that the sickness is still in you
that the dead continue to die
there is no end to the dying?
for this the departed would have had an answer:
a wedding in a graveyard
for you sweet town
they would have spoken they who are no longer among us
& would have shown forth in their splendor
would have danced pellmell
over your stones sweet town
the living & the dead together feathers
would have blown like feathers
from their fingers no like gold like roses
like every corny proposition
fathers or uncles ever gave us they gave us
to call your image back to life
sweet town their voices twittering
like bats over your little houses
is this the sound then that the breath makes
in its final gasp that the dead make
having lived a whole life under water
now coming up for air, to find themselves
in poland in the empty field
bathers who had their bodies torn apart
& ran from you their long guts
hanging, searching the forgotten woods
for houses & the consolation

that death brings children in a circle
dancing without tongues the meadow that had once stood open
shut in remembrance now sweet town
the screams of the cousins carried by the wind
lost in the gentile cities
in the old men's dreams of you
each night sweet town who rise up from their beds
like children bellowing their words
stuck in their beards like honey
who drift up brok street past the russian church
the doctor's house beside it heavy
& whitebricked in the dream who glide above
napoleon square o little orchards little park
where lovers once walked with lovers children
still capture fishes in thy little pond
its surfaces still green with algae
o sounds of church bells—bimbom—through the frozen air
that call forth death o death o pale photographer
o photos of the sweet town rubbed with blood
o of its streets the photographs its vanished folk
o wanderers who wandered o bodies of the distant dead who stayed
o faces o dimming images lost smiles o girls embracing girls
in deathless photographs o life receding
into images of life you beautiful & pure sweet town
I summon & I summon thee to answer

2

I have come here looking for the bone of my grandfather (I said). Daylight had intervened. The town was no more empty as we walked its length. Then the old man spat—gently—through his beard. I have come here looking for the bone of my son. (Had someone reported a breath of life under his houses—a movement

within the soil like worms & caterpillars?) Tell the Poles that they should come to me. I am a baker & a child. I have no one to take me from this darkness.

Then he asked—or was it I who asked or asked *for* him?—were there once Jews here? Yes, they told us, yes they were sure there were, though there was no one here who could remember. What was a Jew like? they asked. (The eye torn from its socket hung against his cheek.) Did he have hair like this? they asked. How did he talk—or did he? Was a Jew tall or short? In what ways did he celebrate the Lord's day? (A rancid smell of scorched flesh choked us.) Is it true that Jews come sometimes in the night & spoil the cows' milk? Some of us have seen them in the meadows—beyond the pond. Long gowns they wear & have no faces. Their women have sharppointed breasts with large black hairs around the nipples. At night they weep. (Heads forced in the bowls until their faces ran with excrement.) No one is certain still if they exist. (Plants frozen at the bottom of a lake, its surface covered by thick ice.)

They spoke & paused. Spoke & paused again. If there was a history they couldn't find it—or a map. The cemetery they knew was gone, the dead dispersed. (On summer days the children digging in the marketplace might come across a bone.) And the shops? we asked. The stalls? The honey people? Vanished, vanished in the earth, they said. The red names & the flower names. The pink names. (There was a people once, they said, we called the old believers. A people with black beards & eyes like shrivelled raisins. Out of the earth they came & lived among us. When they walked their bodies bent like yours & scraped the ground. They had six fingers on each hand. Their old men had the touch of women when we rubbed against them. One day they dug a hole and went back into the earth. They live there to this day.)

The village pump you spoke about still stands back of the city hall (they told us). The rest was all a dream.

3
[by gematria]

a wheel
dyed red

an apparition

set apart

out of the furnace

[16.vi.88]

ANNA RABINOWITZ

THREE POEMS

DESCENT

She was supposed to be ascending, but who cares
to see a woman going up if given the choice.
Let her cascade down the winding stairs

looking like dynamite-riven armor or worse:
a julienne of skived leather, perhaps, a crush of tin,
the aftermath of an earthquake, an accordion coerced

to unfold, a swagger of broken violins
deprived of their tone, a house coming down,
shingles splintered, or a nude with an affliction

of shingles coming down, a shingle factory coming down,
or better yet, explosion of the shingle factory.
Or is she a man? Or disguised as a man

out to prove she won't be known easily,
or that broken into planes she's a presence
who can make it with or without the stairway,

up or down if she wishes, wherever she is.
Sequential, analytic, machine-like or not,
guyed as a hoax or revered as a goddess,

she makes the future bend to her strut.
This kind of woman troops down to step out.

SAPPHO COMMENTS ON AN EXHIBITION OF EXPRESSIONIST LANDSCAPES

Then, she says, a penis is needed, female
artists almost always can use one, put in
charge with tools like brushes and palette knives to
build up their pictures,

the way men do, spraying great skeins of yellow,
cobalt blue and crimson across the canvas,
rage or quiet made at their will, exploding
measures of failure,

risking planes, dissolving full spaces, Bluemner
hurling turquoise clouds on a purple field as
blackbirds wheel in formation, Hartley sculpting
skies out of granite,

oil as cloud made palpable, air as breathless
form accreting mass in its own defense while
ends begin and boundaries disappear.
This is how men die.

Now, she says, O'Keeffe is my point, consigned to
desiccated bones smoother than silk, unblemished
petals, lilies swollen in heat, faint tensions
vectored through tunnels,

warm vaginas, moisture of vulvas, furtive
stand-ins, meanings plain as your face: a woman
minus penis making art with her body,
trapped in her body.

AGE

Yes, it is you in the mirror with fine vertical lines scribed along the margins of your mouth, you with skin pleated like Fortuny silk, you with fingers pied brown, rising to peaks at brittle joints.

Each day is a gift you parcel with care. Wrapped in the sheet, you wake slow at 10 a.m., curled on your side in the fetal position that gives your spine relief. You have breakfast—a saucer of cereal with milk, an inch of sliced banana, half a cup of decaf—tidy the bed, dust where dust has rarely been, call Janet, then Rose, make sure their day's begun, as yours.

By noon, if it is sunny, you sit at the pool, discuss the weather, exchange stories about granddaughters who sing with bands in Paris, grandsons who earn $50,000 per year right out of law school, young couples who carry babies on their backs to rock concerts. You try to understand how time and blood have spun their threads. You try to ignore the ache that resumes its place at the base of your spine.

Later, in the kitchen, before you turn to the TV and your daily paper, you get down on your hands and knees to ease the pain, go fetal again. Above you the domed ceiling emits a warm yellowed light through Lucite tile. You arch your body, press your forehead to the floor. Weightless, you ride the earth while it turns its back to the sun and dark rises from an ancient crust.

Each morning another day, each evening another night.

It is more than you expect.

GERRIT LANSING

ON SERIAL PAINTING: *THE AMBIGUITIES* OF THORPE FEIDT

In 1975 Thorpe Feidt began a series of paintings, all of them in acrylic, which he calls *The Ambiguities.*

What is a series?

The paintings, sometimes consisting of several panels, vary in size. The smallest so far is 8 X 10 inches; the largest, 5-1/2 X 26 feet. Feidt intends there to be 333 of them.

333: the number of Shugal, the Dog of the Desert, guardian of the Path of Dispersive Ambiguities or Lies Falsely So Called.

Feidt is a voracious reader. ("A varied scope of reading, little suspected by his friends, and randomly acquired by a random but lynx-eyed mind, in the course of the multifarious, incidental, bibliographic encounterings of almost any civilized young inquirer after Truth. . ."—Herman Melville, *Pierre or, The Ambiguities,* Hendricks House, 1949, New York, p. 333.) Reading *Pierre or, The Ambiguities,* he noted that the mystical treatise of Plotinus Plinlimmon (of which only the first Lecture "Chronometricals and Horologicals" is given by Melville) called EI ("If") was said to consist of 333 sections. Feidt determined to limit his series of paintings to 333 canvases.

His idea of how the 333 paintings were to be in the world has changed since he began the project. At first and for some time thereafter he phantasied an enormous building like a labyrinth that could contain them all; now (1988) his idea is that they go out into the world, disperse as far as possible. Though they are numbered, their order, of viewing or position, is not rigid or dogmatically given in his imagined experience.

Colors in the paintings are as various as each canvas invokes. There are a few in black and white or gray, but more frequently the colors tumble and play together in all hues of bright and dark. It seems in the earliest *Ambiguities* lemon-yellow and black dominate, while by the #30s other colors have entered the arena. The

canvases darken in the #50s and #60s but brighten again thereafter, though the impression of darkness is rarely absent.

Figures are shadowy in the earlier paintings, but move towards clarification, and landscapes define themselves increasingly in the later work.

Feidt is not a "visionary" painter in the usual sense of the word, since the outering of vision is subordinated in his work to the incursion of the world in the process itself of painting. I.e., there is no reproduction of vision previous to the painting activity. For this painter, as in Novalis's speculation, the senses are "nothing but modifications of the organ of thought" so the body of the paint is enlivened and enlivening.

In January of 1988 Feidt completed "The Expulsion Altarpiece" (*The Ambiguities* numbers 214–218) one of the most ambitious works in the series. By the middle of 1988 he had reached #232.

Feidt, who has been since 1973 an Instructor in painting, drawing and the history of art at the Montserrat College of Art in Beverly, Massachusetts, received his training at the Philadelphia College of Art and the Pratt Institute. He has exhibited at many solo and group exhibitions in Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, and the New England area.

Narrative is any propounding. Feidt, though widely read in contemporary poetry, says he was not influenced, in the making of the *Ambiguities* series, by the idea of the "serial poem" as put forward in particular by Jack Spicer and Robin Blaser. Examples: *Les Chimères* by Gérard de Nerval (so cited by Blaser); "Sonnets," 1854–1872, by Frederick Goddard Tuckerman; *Medieval Scenes* by Robert Duncan; *The Moth Poem* by Robin Blaser; and my own (adv.) *The Soluble Forest is Swimming Across* ("Analytic Psychology").

The concept of the Serial Poem is crucial to Michael Ondaatje's fine anthology *The Long Poem Anthology* (Coach House Press, 1979, Toronto).

Blaser writes in his essay "The Fire," "I'm interested in a particular kind of narrative—what Jack Spicer and I agreed to call in our own work the serial poem; this is a narrative which refuses to adopt an imposed story line, and completes itself only in the sequence of poems. . .The poems tend to act as a sequence of energies which run out when so much of a tale is told. . ."

The Serial Poem proceeds by relatively short "chunks" as Spicer notes, and so *The Ambiguities* is, or are, formed of discrete canvases, blocks of imagined experience, each complete in itself but resonating with others.

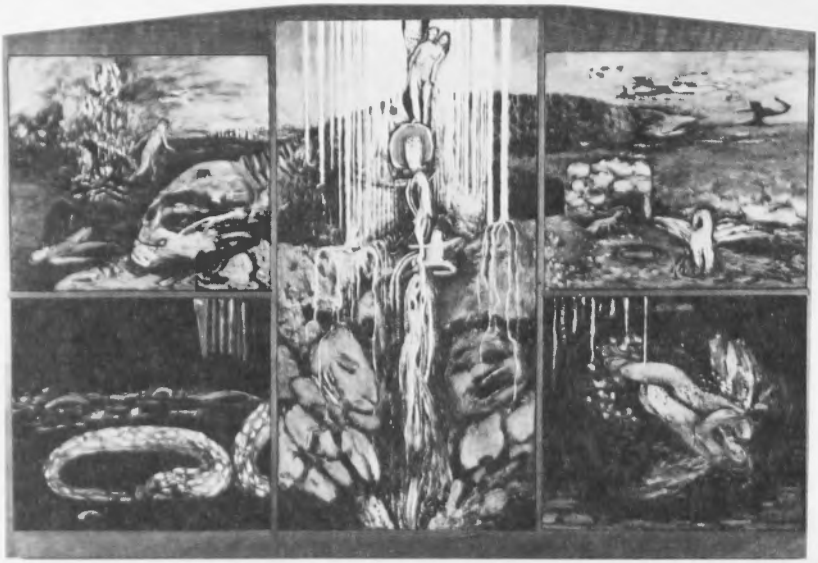
The mystery of the creative act, unforeknown, is stressed by Spicer ("You have to go into a serial poem not knowing what the hell you're doing. . .") and by Feidt. These wanderings are perilous, can be ruinous. Melville was addressing Spicer, and all other adventurers of the castaway, in this passage:

> "Ah, thou rash boy! are there no couriers in the air to warn thee away from these imperilings, and point thee to those Cretan labyrinths, to which thy life's cord is leading thee? Where are now the high beneficences? Whither fled the sweet angels that are alleged guardians to man?"
>
> —*Pierre or, The Ambiguities*

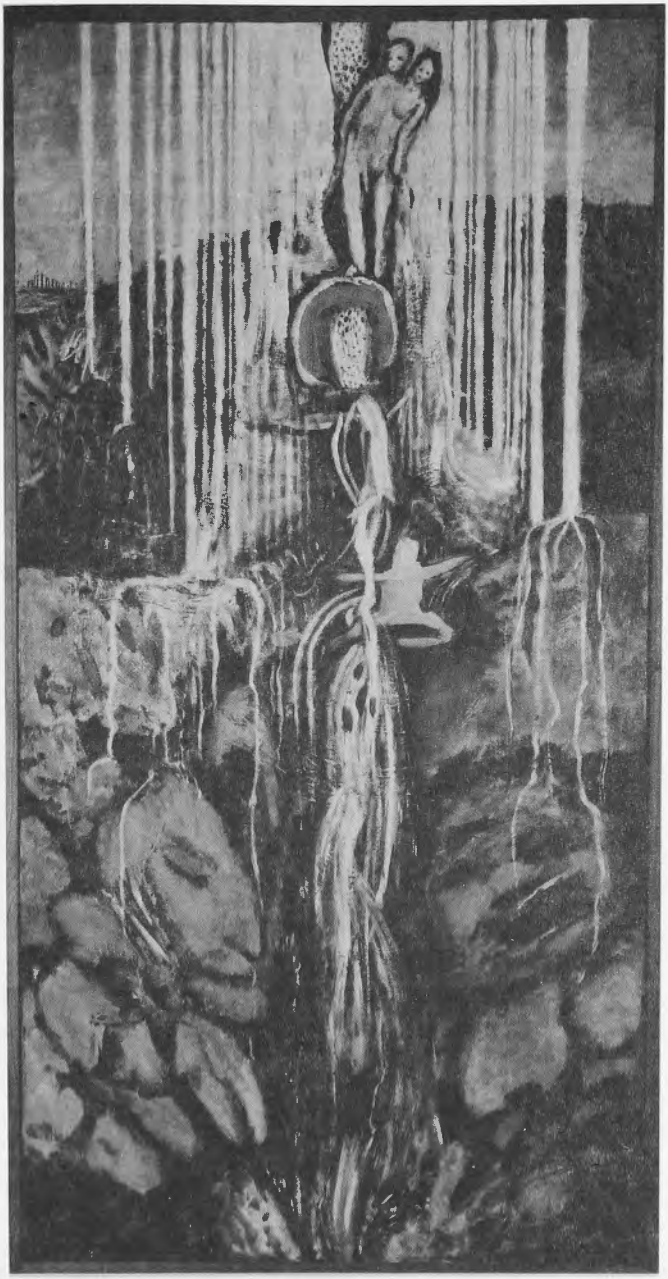
Feidt's *The Ambiguities* is the ongoing record of such a labyrinthine way. Blaser speaks of the serial poem as "often like a series of rooms where the lights go on and off. . ." One may detect echoes in *The Ambiguities* from other artwork, from Cave Paintings to Delacroix and Edward Münch, but the surprises that await the viewer are also and always recognitions of deep burning energies that are her or his very own.

THORPE FEIDT

FOUR PAINTINGS



THE SACRED THEORY OF THE EARTH
(THE AMBIGUITIES 207–211),
FOR GERRIT LANSING
1987, Acrylic On Canvas, 39" X 61"
Frames by Ashley Thompson



THE SACRED THEORY OF THE EARTH
Detail, Central Panel

THE EXPULSION ALTARPIECE
(THE AMBIGUITIES 214–218)

1987–88, Acrylic On Canvas,
54" X 96"; Closed, 54" X 48"
Frame by Ashley Thompson
From the collection of Bruce Wolosoff

THE EXPULSION ALTARPIECE
Closed

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Two Chapters from *NOVICES: A STUDY OF POETIC APPRENTICESHIP*

Chapter 7

The alchemist Fulcanelli: "The picture of the labyrinth is thus offered to us as emblematic of the whole labour of the Work, with its two major difficulties, one the path which must be taken in order to reach the centre—where the bitter combat of the two natures takes place—the other the way which the artist must follow in order to emerge. It is there that ***the thread of Ariadne*** becomes necessary for him, if he is not to wander among the winding paths of the task, unable to extricate himself."[1]

Anton Ehrenzweig: "Any creative search, whether for a new image or idea, involves the scrutiny of an often astronomical number of possibilities. The correct choice between them cannot be made by a conscious weighing up of each single possibility cropping up during the search; if attempted it would only lead us astray. A creative search resembles a maze with many nodal points. From each of these points many possible pathways radiate in all directions leading to further crossroads where a new network of high- and by-ways comes into view. Each choice is equally crucial for further progress. The choice would be easy if we could command an aerial view of the entire network of nodal points and radiating pathways still lying ahead. This is never the case. If we would map out the

entire way ahead, no further search would be needed. As it is, the creative thinker has to make a decision about his route without having the full information needed for his choice. This dilemma belongs to the essence of creativity."[2]

From the 1950 Webster's New International Dictionary: "panopticon (pan + Gr. *optikon,* neut. of *optikos* of or for sight). 1. A kind of optical instrument, as a combination of a telescope and microscope. 2. A prison built so radially that the guard at a central position can see all the prisoners. 3. A place where everything can be seen; an exhibition room for novelties."

There is an archetypal poem, and its most ancient design is probably the labyrinth. One suddenly cuts in, leaving the green world for the apparent stasis and darkness of the cave. The first words of a poem propose and nose forward toward a confrontation with what the writer is only partially aware of, or may not be prepared to address until it emerges, flushed forth by digressions and meanders. Poetry twists toward the unknown and seeks to realize something beyond the poet's initial awareness. What it seeks to know might be described as the unlimited interiority of its initial impetus. If a "last line," or "conclusion," occurs to me upon starting to write, I have learned to put it in immediately, so it does not hang before me, a lure, forcing the writing to constantly skew itself so that this "last line" continues to make sense as such.

As far as poetry is concerned, "the bitter combat of the two natures" can be understood as the poet's desire to discover something new or unique vs. the spectral desire of tradition to defeat the new and to continue to assert its own primacy. It is a "bitter" combat because the realization which writing a poem may provide is inevitably partial. The Minotaur is at best crippled, never slain, and the poet never strides forth from the labyrinth, heroic and intact. At best he crawls forth, "wounded" as in the cry of Vallejo in INTENSITY AND HEIGHT; more often than not, he never emerges at all. The poet never leaves this combat with a

total poem, because such a poem would confirm that the discrepancy between desire and the fulfillment of desire had been eliminated. But since my desire is ultimately to create reality and not merely to observe it, I am bound to be defeated if reality is at stake in my poem's ambition. As I emerge from my poem, regardless of what I have realized while in the poem, I am back in the observable biological continuum, and part of it, part of its absolute mortality. I suspect that I am always aware of *this* closure, and that it underwrites (asunderwrites) what I envision while inside the poem.

Harold Bloom's "Six Revisionary Ratios,"[3] which propose to identify "intra-poetic relationships" among the poets that for Bloom constitute an Anglo-American Romantic tradition, may be most useful to poets themselves as a reading of the stages involved in working through a particular poem. Bloom of course intends his "ratios" to challenge current critical attitudes, and as such, it is a book that could only offend poets who are not named as part of the center stage action of Bloom's "tradition," which becomes increasingly arbitrary as it approaches the present. Its argument in which an earlier poet becomes the focus of a struggle on the part of a later poet, who must wrest manna from the former in order to assert himself, is actually depicted by Blake in his vision of his struggle with Milton in *Milton: A Poem*. My idea here is to regard this "struggle" in the context of Fulcanelli's and Ehrenzweig's images of the labyrinth as a symbol of the creative process, in which much more than literary combat takes place. The nodes, or advance positions, that send out radial possibilities everywhichway, are charged with the poet's personal life as well as the context of his times, to mention two considerable influential powers that lie outside Bloom's sense of influence.

Here are Bloom's Six Ratios, followed by the keyword he focuses them with:

1. Clinamen, or Swerve
2. Tessera, or Completion
3. Kenosis, or Emptying
4. Daemonization, or Counter-Sublime

5. Askesis, or Curtailment
6. Apophrades, or Holding Open to the Dead

Is it possible that these terms double Fulcanelli's three-beat rhythm of the labyrinth, offering a more complex and asymmetrical sense of the contractions and expansions involved in solving the burden many but not all poems take on?

The poet Swerves into the poem by redirecting his attention from the utilitarian world to one in which "precise subjectivity"[4] is constantly at stake. Or think of the poet as a falling angel who refuses at the last moment to continue to fall and become one of the fallen (= unimaginative man, the literal minded, one for whom the objective world is the real world). He Swerves, beating his wings up, up, up, and enters a new space.

The Swerve into imaginative space together with the first few words or lines, determine mode, tone, direction, and some of the difficulties to be undertaken. Once all of this is in place the poem runs the risk of lapsing into a conventional handling of its direction, in effect Completing itself before it has even gotten underway (as a joke poorly told may imply its punchline and thus be "over" before the actual punchline falls). While the taking on of direction is necessary, if the direction takes its theme or subject matter for granted, the reader has "heard it before," and the poem no longer belongs to itself. Thus the initial move toward Completion must be redirected, or complexed, in order to build up steam, or availability to the unknown that is beyond the poem's initial knowing. Such a move is a contractive one, and would be the Emptying, or willingness to introduce contradiction and/or obscurity via sound-oriented or associational veers.

Emptying makes it possible for the poem to have space for the other or the otherness that can be the most single compelling moment in composition. Daemonization (in contrast to demonization) is the admitting of unconscious material into the composition-in-process, the point at which the poet weds himself, consciousness and unconsciousness fuse—the poet is the world, no

separation between his skin and everything else. The eagle of inspiration has sunk its talons into the poet's shoulders and he is borne aloft. There are many ways to approach this moment: in Blake it would be the moment in which the authors in eternity communicate to mortal secretary William. In D.H. Lawrence, the moment that the wind does blow through him (Lawrence states the archetypal daemon plea in: "Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!"[5]) García Lorca, weary of hearing critics and conventional poets prattle about the Muse and the angel, borrowed from the world of Flamenco dancing the figure of the "duende," which translates into English rather poorly as "imp." It is a figure of the blood for Lorca,[6] an uprushing or seizure, in which the dancer and the poet are momentarily possessed, or incubated (as if by a dream incubus, who lays a psychic egg in the dreamer's body as she fucks him, and "steals" his semen).

Daemonization is perilous because as such it cannot complete the poem (when we are stoned, daemons seem to rush through us, but when we try to articulate their message-sensations, we have nothing—if not less than nothing, for the Daemon of Marijuana loves to gobble up imaginative potential, eating the poem on the spot that had we not gotten stoned might have been *written* the following day). Curtailment is similar to Emptying, in that both are experienced as severe, contractive moments—however, Curtailment is more complex, because the poem has taken on much more burden and possibly unmanageable material than earlier. If the poet does not successfully separate himself from the Daemon's embrace or claws, one result is that inspiration turns into ego-inflation (nearly always just around the corner in Whitman or Ginsberg). In Curtailment (Bloom's Ratio term, Askesis, is based on "ascetic"), the poet must cut into his own beanstalk, bringing the drama tumbling down or seeing into the meaning of the action in Giant Castle through a narrowing, densifying perception. Or to put it another way: in Curtailment, I step outside the poem and in a sense become my own critic, looking for loose ends, ego-inflations that have gotten into the Daemonization, gaps to be plugged—while at the same time I must stay with the shape of the energy recast by the Daemonization.

Bloom's Apophrades is a marvelous image. The dead, the great dead, return to inhabit our houses—life returns to before that fall in which a Swerve was a possibility. The dead return—the poem is over, *the way things are* overwhelms metaphor. The poet, like a streaker now, shows himself to the dead, a phantomic act the dead could care little about. The dead return, life returns to its deadliness, its obliviousness to poetry. Our poems end because at Curtailment we know we cannot escape the product of the poem if we are to have art at all; we know we cannot sustain the poem against the desire of the dead to reinhabit the *temenos* they believed they inhabited in their own time. In a great closure (Wallace Stevens' "Each person completely touches us / With what he is and as he is / In the stale grandeur of annihilation."[7]) there is a shadowed Daemonization, an embrace at the edge of here and not-here.

The dead are now back in our houses. We are outside, outsiders to the poem, peripheral, schizophrenic, caught up in the physical need to reconnect. Every completed poem collects its rejected children, bundles them into its immense laundry-basket and takes off. Image of its huge ass, in peasant shoes, hurrying away from Van Gogh's corn field.

*

1 Fulcanelli: Master Alchemist, *Le Mystère des Cathédrales*, London, 1974, p. 48. On the following page, Fulcanelli offers an alchemical definition of Ariadne. "Placements II," in my *The Name Encanyoned River: Selected Poems 1960–1985*, explores the resonance of Ariadne as the "mistress of the labyrinth."

2 Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, Berkeley, 1971, pp. 35–37. Ehrenzweig's drawing of "the maze" (serial structure) on p. 36, reminds me of shattered glass more than of the concentrically infolding/outfolding labyrinth. See also Van Gogh's "The Starry Night," with its two milky flows of light, one curling down to tuck into the other curling up—a figure Wilhelm Reich identified as "Cosmic Superimposition." The so-called "serial poem" (Whitman's "Song of Myself," Jack Spicer's "Books") attempts to make use of nodal discontinuities, viewing sections as corresponding rather than connecting.

3 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, NYC, 1973, pp. 14–15. The novice must decide to what extent Bloom's highly exclusionary study (in which only several 20th century American poets appear in a context that presents them as representing the end of an essentially English literary tradition) is a projection of his own anxious desire to be with poets, one of them, a poet himself. Is it possible that in failing to realize himself as a poet, he envisions the end of a great tradition in his own time, and appoints himself as the eagle-surveyor on a crag overlooking a battlefield of his own construction that stretches narrowly back to Milton?

4 Robert Kelly's phrase, which will appear in his own context later in *Novices*.

5 *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, Vol. 1, NYC, 1964, p. 250.

6 "Theory and Function of the Duende," *Lorca*, The Penguin Poets, London, 1960. See Robert Duncan's novice encounter with Lorca elaborated in the 1972 Preface to *Caesar's Gate*. For distinctions between "daemon" and "demon," see James Hillman's *The Dream and the Underworld*, NYC, 1979, especially the "Barriers" section, which considers Materialism, Oppositionalism, and Christianism. Emily Dickinson's #754, written around 1863, is as severe a description as I know of of Daemonization and the extent to which its possession can become a life possession, a living out of an alien other's commands. Lawrence emphasizes unconscious message over the poet's willing; in Dickinson's visionary description, the poet is seen as a tool (a gun), at the trigger-mercy of an owner-duende who can fire her at whim (see Susan Howe's thoughtful and differing consideration of this poem in *My Emily Dickinson*, Berkeley, 1985):

My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—
In Corners—till a Day
The Owner passed—identified—
And carried Me away—

And now We roam in Sovreign Woods—
And now We hunt the Doe—
And every time I speak for Him—
The Mountains straight reply—

And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow—
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let it's pleasure through—

And when at Night—Our good Day done—
I guard My Master's Head—
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
Deep Pillow—to have shared—

To foe of His—I'm deadly foe—
None stir the second time—

On whom I lay a Yellow Eye—
Or an emphatic Thumb—

Though I then He—may longer live
He longer must—than I—
For I have but the power to kill,
Without—the power to die—

7 Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems*, NYC, 1957, p. 505.

Chapter 8

My sense of poetic labyrinth here is very flexible—for one writer "the bitter combat" at the center may fill the stage, and for another opening and/or closure may be so difficult that the other stages seem to be nonexistent. And too, there are experiences of the labyrinth which are not engaged by the use I have made of Bloom's "Ratios." To some extent, the elaboration of any vision is labyrinthine. Olson's vision of Homer's *The Odyssey* as a dance-drama, in which a shaman-hero dances his way through a gauntlet of monsters to be reunited with a human other,[1] suggests how labyrinthine a 20 year voyage can be. While a single poem may be experienced as working through a maze, such a poem may also be a mere knot in a network that is comprised of all the writer's poems as well as his unwritten life. In relation to the labyrinth, I would like to consider one of several existent poetic Curriculums for novices. Unlike the others I will mention later, it is not a set of proposals or even an argument, but a tilting assembly of names, subjects and ideas that evoke the accesses and restrictions of the labyrinth itself.

Charles Olson's "A Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul" may be especially baffling for the novice accustomed to poetry anthologies that for the most part contain poems which the editors feel are self-contained, and can be examined and taught as discrete objects. Poets who tend to write discrete lyrics (Robert Herrick, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost) can be fairly represented in such anthologies. Poets whose work is primarily constellational—in which individual poems refer not only to themselves but are part of the diagram of a larger constellation—are poorly represented. This is a primary reason, in my opinion, for bypassing anthologies

and reading all poets in terms of individual books that in most cases they themselves organized.[2] This does not mean that such poets as William Blake, Ezra Pound, and Charles Olson only write poems that are referential to their own systems—all three, in fact, have written superb self-contained lyric poems. What it does mean is that to appreciate a passage in *The Four Zoas,* or *The Cantos,* or *The Maximus Poems,* you need to know the way in which the entire poem relates to what has come before it and after it in the poet's body of work. Poets who attempt to increase the responsibilities of poetry by drawing upon the materials of nonliterary disciplines—who in effect strive for a vision big enough to combat the resistance of their times to poetry—are almost inevitably pedagogical.

On February 9, 1968, Olson sent his student George Butterick a 2 page "outline," that on one hand was probably spontaneous (reflecting current preoccupations) and on the other the result of 20 years of research and writing. Such a "Plan" suggests a mysterious correspondence between terrestrial labyrinths, star maps, and the human mind. Not only does this "Plan" fail to follow the steps of most outlines, it treats its "subjects" as if they were pick-up-sticks that had suddenly been loosed from the poet's grip, falling everywhichway on the page. The only "direction" is that indicated by the fact that the title, one third of the way down on the right-hand page, is under a phrase ending in the word "completion," suggesting that the "Plan" is to be read as a kind of asymmetrical swirl, working down from the title on the right-hand page, crossing over to the left-hand page and following it upward, to then cross back to the right-hand page and end with "completion." The problem with following such a direction is that the left-hand page has obviously been written from the top down. Another reading possibility is to disperse with direction entirely, and take the subjects and suggestions as "free bodies" brought together in a single double-page arena. If they are taken as a set of leads, the novice can follow them out himself. By coming to terms with "Alchemy—rather by plates [as connected to dreams]" or with what Olson might mean by "Bach's *belief,*" he can (often by arguing with Olson) start to develop his own assembly of intersecting subjects or directions.

how to live as a
single natural being
the dogmatic nature of
(order of)
experience

how many?
& how each
made known,
exercised,

as

organs &
function – activity
of the soul
or psyche or
Heaven or God

Ismaeli muslimism

&, all together,
create
organism

Alchemy – rather by plates

/– as connected to dreams –/

pictorialism

as in Earth, "View"

& perspective
/cf. Weyl on ocular
power

Vision

×

Messages

technically, Analytic Psychology, as only technical study I know of modern Western man & under enough mental control

jazz playing

dance as individual
body-power

equally say Homer's art

Bach's belief

/cf. Novalis'
"subjects"

Egyptian hieroglyphs
– drawing

(gesture, speech
habits
mental condition

the Norse
& the Arabs

–locally, American
Indians

matter

Phenomenological

Sensation and Attention
⌐ training in exahaustion &
completion

A Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul

(Intuition
& Feeling one's own
the Mushroom dream woman mind language

Earth as a
geology ∧ comprehension like archeology
geography – equally, though here maps & experience of
human history walking
in this connection, as habitat
inhabitation of, rather than as politics say
or national. Instead, physical &
vertically incremental

physical
man as animal ⌐ praxis of – as Earth as a

emotional mental experience

Poets as such, that is disciplined lives not
history or for any "art" reasons example,

Blake
the same, say, medicine men

& like theologians: example, Dante – Giotto

Charles Olson

Butterick objected to the word "drugs" in the copy sent to him by Olson, and apparently made other objections to the "Plan." In a letter of February 26, Olson replied: "Just for further accuracy please change word drugs in 1st line of Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul to the Mushroom. I find your objection, that there is nothing new in the above, a curious demand, and not actually relevant, I don't think, to the proposal. That is, the need, in fact—or at least what seemed to me the gain of this particular spreading was to have a congestin [sic] which ought to be including and likewise exclusive. Or at least that, so placed, it can then be tested for thoroughness. In fact what new is as interesting now as condensation?"[3]

It is fascinating to follow out what has been done to date with Olson's "Plan." It was first published in *Magazine of Further Studies* #5, 1968, and was subsequently taken up as an investigative poetic "working" by another Olson student (and the editor of *Further Studies),* Jack Clarke who selected 28 keywords from the total 223, and after consulting two other students, Albert Glover and Fred Wah, assigned these words to 28 members of the Olson community, with the proposal that each would write a 20 to 50 page "fascicle" off of that word. All but 5 fascicles have been written and published (for the most part in the early 1970s). When all 28 are completed, along with Olson's *Pleistocene Man* (letters to Clarke, during October 1965), to be included in the set without a number, the "Curriculum" will be bound and published as a single volume, each fascicle becoming a chapter.

It is difficult to say to what extent the individual fascicles are successful; most are novicework, writing by Olson-allied students who by the early 1970s had only a fragmentary sense of Olson's body of work and who had not, at least at that time found their own footing.[4] Only a handful represent significant research contributions to Olson's subjects or could be considered engaging collections of poetry. However, more important than achievement in this instance, is the extent to which the fascicles demonstrate that there was a circle of novices around a single poet who cared enough for his vision to contribute up to 50 pages on a single

word of it. Olson did not *assign* the fascicles; they were generated by the students themselves. In response to my letter inquiring as to what use had been made of the "Plan" and the fascicles, Clarke replied: "Actually, there has been no thought of 'use' of it, only a place to be together, the O-community i.e., those living in his 'world,' his 'soul?' After his death in 1970, we all needed something to survive the boredom of what was to follow i.e., *before the war,* as Duncan says. We will soon publish the definitive text of *Dante* [Duncan's fascicle, #8], replacing both the earlier fascicle and [the poem in] *Groundwork,* to be sold modestly as 'book,' i.e., that will be Glover Publishing *for* the Institute of Further Studies."

*

1 For Olson's perceptive notes on the Upper Paleolithic, see *Olson* #10, 1978, Storrs, CT. Ten issues of *Olson* were researched, edited and annotated by George Butterick as part of his own poetic apprenticeship. Butterick, who also edited and annotated over 4000 pages of Olson's poetry, prose, and correspondence, died of cancer in July, 1988, at 46. While he wrote poetry at many points over the two decades of his full-time Olson scholarship, he gave Olson all the front burners, modestly placing his own poems on back ones. Butterick's gesture is tragically moving and perhaps unique in a world in which most novices, sidestepping the risks of a prolonged apprenticeship, only find time for themselves.

2 Other reasons to avoid anthologies: teachability is a prime consideration (how much Stein, Zukofsky and Spicer do you find in current anthologies?)—especially as the selections move toward the present, easy-to-read poems that follow in the wake of the established teachable masters are the rule. The editors are not entirely to blame (though nearly all of them go along with the situation), as trade publishers rely considerably on reports from the field (who the professors want to teach) when they decide whether or not a particular anthology (after production and often high permission fees) will make a profit. While minority poets appear with increasing regularity, many appear to be selected on two bases: they will give the anthology a democratic appearance, and they will not offend Professor X because the poems selected read like the poems of their mainstream male writing-workshop contemporaries.

3 When looking at someone's outline or program for others, it is important to decide if their own poetry and poetics backs it up. Olson's concern with "spreading," "congestin," and "condensation" have underpinnings in his work at large. The "Plan" is one of many manifestations of Olson's attempt to revision life as turning on a single center, with the poet as integral to a will to cohere. The "Plan" thus embodies the tension

between his extensive "spread" of historical and interdisciplinary materials, and his ongoing "condensation" of his findings. See "The Gate and the Center" essay in *Human Universe*, NYC, 1967. Unfortunately, like most poets of his generation (Robert Duncan being a striking exception), he assumed a male reader. Thus, in the "Plan," men are identified as individuals e.g., Bach, Blake, Dante, Novalis, Weyl—and women generically as Woman.

4 The Institute of Further Studies fascicles are as follows:

#1 *The Mushroom*, by Albert Glover, 1972.
#2 *Dream*, by Duncan McNaughton, 1973.
#3 *Woman*, by John Wieners, 1972.
#4 *Mind* (assigned to Robert Creeley).
#5 *Language* (assigned to Edward Dorn).
#6 *Earth*, by Fred Wah, 1974.
#7 *Blake*, by John Clarke, 1973.
#8 *Dante*, by Robert Duncan, 1974.
#9 *Homer's Art* (assigned to Alice Notley).
#10 *Bach's Belief* (assigned to Robin Blaser).
#11 *Novalis' "Subjects,"* by Robert Dalke, 1973.
#12 *The Norse*, by George Butterick, 1973.
#13 *The Arabs*, by Edward Kissam, 1972.
#14 *American Indians*, by Edgar Billowitz, 1972.
#15 *Jazz Playing*, by Harvey Brown, 1977.
#16 *Dance*, by Lewis MacAdams, 1972.
#17 *Egyptian Hieroglyphs*, by Edward Sanders, 1973.
#18 *Ismaeli Muslimism*, by Michael Bylebyl, 1972.
#19 *Alchemy*, by David Tirrell, 1972.
#20 *Perspective*, by Daniel Zimmerman, 1974.
#21 *Vision*, by Drummond Hadley, 1972.
#22 *Messages*, by James Koller, 1972.
#23 *Analytic Psychology*, by Gerrit Lansing, 1983.
#24 *Organism*, by Michael McClure, 1974.
#25 *Matter*, by John Thorpe, 1975.
#26 *Phenomenological* (assigned to Joanne Kyger).
#27 *Sensation*, by Anselm Hollo, 1972.
#28 *Attention*, by Robert Grenier, 1985.

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

ȮNȮME

Ȯnȯme. How have you seen the police. Please. *Ȯnȯme.* We hear brains, explicit things. Think. *Ȯnȯme.* We mean dreams. We mean dreams are *o—bliterating this little child "self"*—still. I have seen them—do. I have seen *do it* and, with sticks, what is odd is—it is very odd—is, *Ȯnȯme,* I have been particularly focussed—a chill on her—*inheriting this marvelous filial intelligence making o—bliterating this little child "self"* ill. *Ȯnȯme.* No, I have not been particularly focussed. I have been *seen* repeatedly focussed on her—and he's on me. One free hand. One freehand sketching. One free hand sketching burning candles through the window. The consecutive phases of lighting and extinguishing the candles gives things a terrible moment in the head—doubt. I don't doubt I have seen this and can distinguish between murder and love, if it's near me. She's covered in love—a chill on her. I have seen him near her, enter—*private affections, explicit things*—make light of her, in her ear, the thing down there in the canal, covered in love—a chill on her, enters me. *Ȯnȯme.* When it snows I have spent the winter in this manor thinking anything near me will happen, and he's on me. *Ȯnȯme.* How have you seen the police.

This man is taller

This man I remember
Taller pallor enters her
Her home
This man has been slept in the fairgrounds when it snows
He has called her
I have been seen seeing her go to a phone—one time
I know this man you have already on line is wrong only—this time
I know he has the same sense of shuffling things around the home

The same crystallized pallor, tone
But he has no real power
He has distinguished between murder and love—one time
He has no
Private affections, explicit things
This man you want is more at home
With her things

Listen, Lt. The question is who said it and who feels more at home with her things—say books—to have, to make her look at him. I have seen him do it and—with sticks—how have you seen the police—tell it. *Ȯnȯme:*

> When I say quote he's on me
> It's a figure—only—
> of some speech. . .
>
> It has no weight to it
> It's in the lens I saw

Listen, Lt. I don't use language—or love—to mystify my fear of it:

> When I say quote he's on me
> He's caught—only—
> in my lens immensely seen
> to be with her

Listen, Lt. When I am looking at language—or love—I don't seize on violence to mystify my fear of silence. It just happens. It just happens I have spent a winter in this manor thinking anything near me will happen, and he's on me:

> When I say quote he's on me
> I mean you

How have you seen the police. Tell it. *Ȯnȯme.* "Whenever the text permitted real cries

fell mute" (Moriarty said it)

DONALD REVELL

THREE POEMS

THE PASTORAL TRADITION

It is possible to live backwards
just as each day leans into an ovation
cupped like rain, an emptiness beneath memory
along the edge of a leaf, at the verge
of parkland, in the streaked reflection
of street life across the bows of windows.

It is possible to live backwards
because we have eyes in our heads
and to look at the world is to empty it
into first versions of itself
lustful and much taller today
among the violets under a late rain.

It is possible to live backwards
because love is vision, a sustained applause.
A man looks at a child and it turns away.
A man looks at wildflowers from his car
and the whole field turns away from him,
rustling, living backwards into the retreating sunlight.

WHITE PASTORAL

It is not a film. You cannot stay outside of it
feeling the actual breeze and scent

or play it backward to the place where everyone
agreed upon a destination, a politics
in which no one is exploited and the material
for weightless summer clothes appears from nowhere.

I cannot call it death, although some would
as they would throw a coin onto a map
of the night sky. The causeless stars are for sale.
Death is harder. It gutters between the names of things
in their stellar loneliness—a hotel orchestra
and a hopelessly late rose. White pastoral.

Out of season, only the elderly
and these others dislodged from their orbits
by marriage or the impossible deaths of young children
darken the shadows behind the palms
at night as the hotel orchestra
presses a tango against the air
where there is no flesh. This is the death
that whitens every smile and is patient.
And I thought it was too late in the year
for roses when one the size of a child's head
fisted through the snapdragons.
It wore the frost of October like a disease
and was four different colors. This is the death
that fractures white light into a finger-splay.
It is not patient. It has no time.
And there was a woman pounding at the door
when I was in bed with another woman.
She was the palest thing you could imagine
in the vertical cold cell of the doorway.
"I am your last chance" she said.
This is the death that does nothing.
It is outside of time, carries no flowers,
and if I had gone with her that night
my flesh would be the air in everybody's old age
and a shepherd would play his scrannel pipe.
White pastoral: the small breast of death,
the legs like a boy's, the causeless

absolute effect of light in someone's skin,
of sound inside of someone's mouth next to you in bed.

It is not a hallucination.
Like a girl in an apron dress
running before her parents to the waterfall
where every Labor Day they take a picnic
and photograph themselves for the winter album,
it exults in the clumsy lives we plan.

I remember being told that no one
ever makes up an hour's sleep once it is lost.
You just go on, tired to the end.
Orchestras disband. Roses collapse inward.
There is no time for happiness, but I feel it
as I feel the weightless summer clothes of the material air.

WARTIME

All the more beautiful in the concert hall
with people in their fine clothes and yourself
in the same place as the original music.
The rest, I imagine, must be like the sound
of a radio orchestra in the nineteen-forties,
Europe fiddling beneath the darkness,
and those abandoned in the capital cities
leaning into the sound as it becomes noise.

Our lives seldom advance. And the beautiful
is a principle either too large
or too small to contain so much loose
and indispensable striving.
That is why I think of music, why I love
even the idea of an orchestra

in the open spaces of the outdoors
and worried corners of rooms during the Blitz, my
love's last hours.

They do not move much, but they are real.
They live in the anticipation
and in the backward aftermath. They feel
light cancelling the illumination
of the previous moment when I told you
Europe was dead. Mahler already knew.
That is why I said that being inside of you
is the harsh Symphony and withdrawing from you

a song at the end, something of the earth
too large for desire, too small to survive.
And these analogies are still nowhere
close to you, close to me, who are trying
so hard to believe that things
are not the hallucinations of bad history
or of autumn settling into its long self-pity
of mists and over-ripeness apt not to change.

In early November, the city parks hum
beneath the thinnest frost. The couples
and solitaries have got it wrong at the
lake's edge, feeding the birds, saying
nothing to themselves or to each other
about the coming holidays, the anticipation
buried close by, in the wrong place perhaps
but someplace. It fills the earth like music.

BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

THREE POEMS

RETROSPECTIVELY, FOR PRIMO LEVI

Poetry's charm is not chiliastic.
We have to die before the apocalypse,
most of us. A heartbeat of pedantry
& stoplight darkhouse gone.

I guess that's why last breaths are drawn,
or how,
or why the water passing from the storm
is spilled on shower floors
"abject" & "henceforthly."

Said Assurbanipal to the toward
glass capturers,
a measuring cup for all
my hanging gardens.

"My Emily Dickinson"

for Susan Howe's

The mind is schematic
if known at all. You
slide down the grip of
it, past resolution.

Aptly & in consequence
distinguished all the while,
deferentially from, ah, the moony
still, the off-ramp glowing town.

Reigns what ever ails the all

for nothingness dim bulb a-

bove the milkless milk, four

score & some odd years before the bill

was paid, the check it bounced
    from hill to crumbling hill.

MUTHOPLOKON

I am passive glimps'd & uncontrollably exerted
where "rear view mirror" = shield of Perseus,
two bits of anxiety on the word
"thou," that uttereth the sound, reversed. . .

Declensions of the past, aorta's
dug, thro' bodied reams of thys dispersing.
Stepp'd forth, the words among, the moon, with shields to say
what stars give up, or off, disbursed & soothing.

TWO POEMS

IN MY IVANHOE

Deñial is a river in Egypt.
I was told to look back and not stare
Mummified in the classic.
We're all here 'cause we're not all there
Christ! wasn't a woman had him
Had a dueling scar, here
In my Ivanhoe.

Most of you were being born when I was
Icing this kiddo. Grim yore of grail-bait
Male medico squirt
Inner Templar Memling down his shirt.
Soubriquet 'one-way Jack'
A pandy for the pansy says the leather of the pack
Did I say gramercy?

Continual chaps tilting out of kilter
Timber tremens. Flapjack in haystack
Sounds in the light of work
Curt *mtt* laconic cream sung with migratory luster
In my panoply. Mowing an apish greengrass virelai
By my bauble! a moral
Sweet to me toenails
Waving pennon of a span scene.

Zoom cam to memory mote. Me and Pa
At the Twin Drive-In
Studs of the cinema steed
Parked car like palfrey, canted

Me more a Wamba than a Wilfred in my Dr D's
Brain-pan broken on Latin and gridiron.

Vassalage. Extensive wood in English song
Flipside spent hunting wolf in de Bois
To *Winterreise*. Grey-goose shaft of a gassy forester
This entity seems to dominate the picture
She thought he'd gone but he'd come. Summer
Being the chief romanceur couldn't
Keep his eyes off her. Bitchin' bodice. A real
Bim.

A cinch his off
Was on. A monk in his spare time
A mind's a wonderful thing to efface
It don't pay to skimp.
A look-see'll snuff stuff. Bip
That's it
No trace of M at the sideboy.
Nice of you to come clean honey
Legend weaves her body yarn
In my Ivanhoe

AT FIRST GLANCE

At nine drank three. Bathed
the back of nothing
in the mirror. The eyes I had
sounded mean doing a quiet
seventy. It was easy
drunk in auto tippling my own
dim man. Arch-mendicant
in this breezy going world.
Fun ain't it a little free

to gloat savagely. Smiled
her shoulder at me. You
who get to liking pretty
wear knuckles out thinking
boudoir tabletray *ubi sunt.*
Her dear white scut. She
with a vague scent and a lot of
leg art lighting it for her.
Reed by faintest breath bent,
cool. Play it clean. That's
all—she threw the switch.
Another boy palmed
in the cooler time

Note

The manuscript sequence CONTINENTAL HARMONY of which these two poems are a part, is an assimilation, almost without exception, of a tone. A tone which in turn was inspired by a tone of my own intuiting in the music and texts of William Billings' last songbook, *The Continental Harmony* (1794). No more, no less. It is improvisational, an efflorescence of my time with these sources.

Billings (1746–1800), born in Boston, was a physical grotesque; a singing master, though tanner by trade, noted for his impulsive, non-conforming behavior. His 'Chester' was played by the Revolutionary Army and achieved in its time a kind of platinum tunehood. His 'Berlin' forms the basis of Ross Lee Finney's *Variations, Fugueing and Rondo,* and another of his hymn tunes is basic to Otto Luening's *Prelude on a Hymn Tune by William Billings.* Part of Billings' importance to us is that his music has seemed to contemporary American composers so indigenous and in some ways close to their own idiom that they have subpoenaed it for their own work.

Billings' attractiveness to his contemporaries was chiefly melodic. There is above all an admirable appropriateness to the needs of a layman's choir that considered music a pastime and was fond of the physical exertion in performing it. Billings has also the distinction, it seems, of being the first composer to end a composition, cast in a major or minor tonality, with a key that strongly differs from that of its opening. Anticipating Charles Ives, another Yankee, Americanist in outlook, he simply meant to have his way.

KAREN KELLEY

FREUD'S WISH

1.

this while she was soaping herself:

how he saw it was his child, could tell by the hair;
(his beard up close, white-flecked, making her hot),
how he'd talked about her openings—

when the child emerged, she saw red (not misty like the room,
blue),
but red was not a word for the talking; it was *without sharpness,
richness or line,*
so she imagined *plug,* which was worse, was a noise,
embarrassing and rubbery—

—to say it all out loud; encourage flowerings.
She was lying (lying) before him,
beneath.

2.

that she kept asking why *no young painter,*
Basquiat, Clemente, Penck,
had begun to capture what knowing love was like

and then, bright-eyed:
"What *is* it like?"

She asked *me* (repressive boot of the Father)

she, who had whispered, "I feel so shaky, so ashamed.
I am wondering why I see this way.
Why are shapes as profound as words;
why is music equal to gesture and to color?
Synesthesia, certainly.
I never took synesthesia to be a metaphor.

"Often I feel hot
and plastic,
as if my body takes imprints
from objects—
obscene objects like railing knobs and the jutting shapes
of headboards and chairs;
and from music,
a single note from a violin;
and colors—blue, for instance;
the turn of a complete stranger's head;
the tone of a voice,
texture of a carpet."

(Bless me Father, for I have—

a hidden Eden) (moats of silence, walls of shame)

Poor child.
In my back pocket I keep hidden
pornographic photographs of the animalesque.

3.

how he'd ridden her like a horse,
talking the whole time about "taking" a man
(which, if it had been a woman, would have been wrong)—
Ah, but words change, he said, *accordingly. Fingers*
was what he meant: he was touching her underneath.

Somehow, when he was riding her, the aspect of the room was
curiously blue—
close to the ceiling she heard obscene Viennese waltzes;
on the floor, old-time dance tunes;
by his chair, thunder and lapping waters—

bluishness of the room,
richness that rolled in her gut, sense of
the forbidden: he would *love* that,
the forbidden,

but she did not say it, *would not make that admission,*

here, under the eyes of the crusty artifacts (crazy straw hair,
ivory inlays the whites of their eyes—);
all around them harsh sounds and brassy jazz played.
Their phalluses were fingers pointing at her;
or perhaps they were pointing her
in a crafty (his) direction—*open up*—

Lying there, she could turn her head: red carpet, sharp focus—
(the Persian pattern like flowers?);
faces of humanity, carved in wood,
crowding;
Papa behind her in his leather chair,
wearing thick white makeup and a filmy pink kimono,
magisterially directing the placement of scenery:
low, patently fake fence between audience and performers;
a painted backcloth of a lake edged with trees;

several cardboard bushes;
a rock that opens to reveal a fiery core;
a full-size tree with moonlight dropping through its painted foliage;
and a semi-Japanese tree house.

The script reads: Suck this, he said, (open up)—

toward cracks in what she'd forgotten (fade up: close to the ceiling, classical music played),
swift arc of her father's towel snatched from the rack by the sink as she entered—

he'd thought she was her mother.

It was his mistake.
(Daddy, Daddy, why have you forsaken me?)

He will not diagnose until he is through with her:
her shaking hands are his chattering teeth,
who has eaten too much sugar:
she is made of rage.

ROBERT PODGURSKI

THREE POEMS

OYSTER GEM

Tear open to get to the mind stuff
Crudest form, but perfected shucking
Yields the golden food undisturbed,
Still
Smell Sea Brine high,
Feeling the breakers against
Back Muscle nerves

SPIDERPLANT

Spider
Calls herself
Clephus
She has been
With me for
Years
My favorite
Arachnidafoliage
As deep rooted
Sic Cthuhlu
Not sleeping
And about

JIMSON'S GIFT

Smelling the wet peatness
Of the jungle growth of petunias
Astride the patio
Sends my mind to a less
Arid land, one where lush
Vegetation thrives,. . .feral
Chaotic growth patterns
Whose origin, one may only
Speculate on a concise
Fertile plant fetus encased
Babe in a seed opening
Cadence of hortum fecundum

Expansion of roots, wild underbrush
Gnarly brambles goetically abrading
The ground, the soft enchanced by
The nettled sting
Over in a barren corner
Datura, a lone thorn apple spreads
Its limbs and toothed fronds
Alone purveying the alien unearthliness
Some things possess
So much in contact with terrum
Clue at a source beyond
The black that nestles stars.

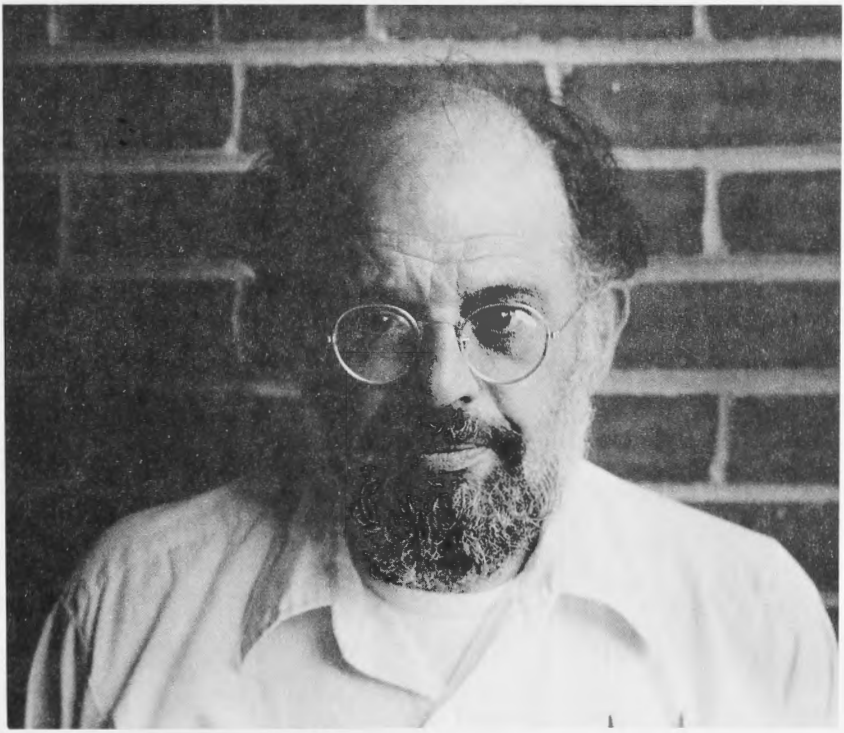
ROBERT TURNEY

SIX PHOTOGRAPHS

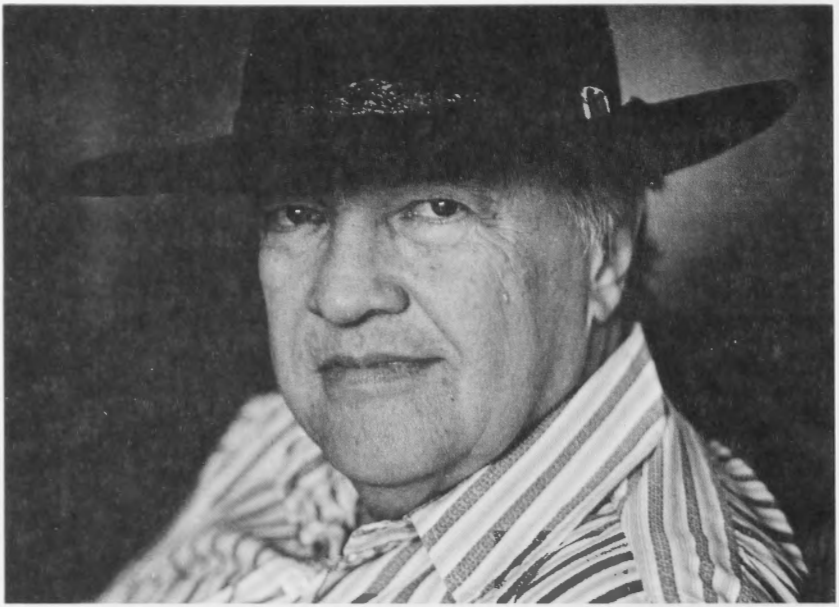
WILLIAM EVERSON

JUDITH MINTY

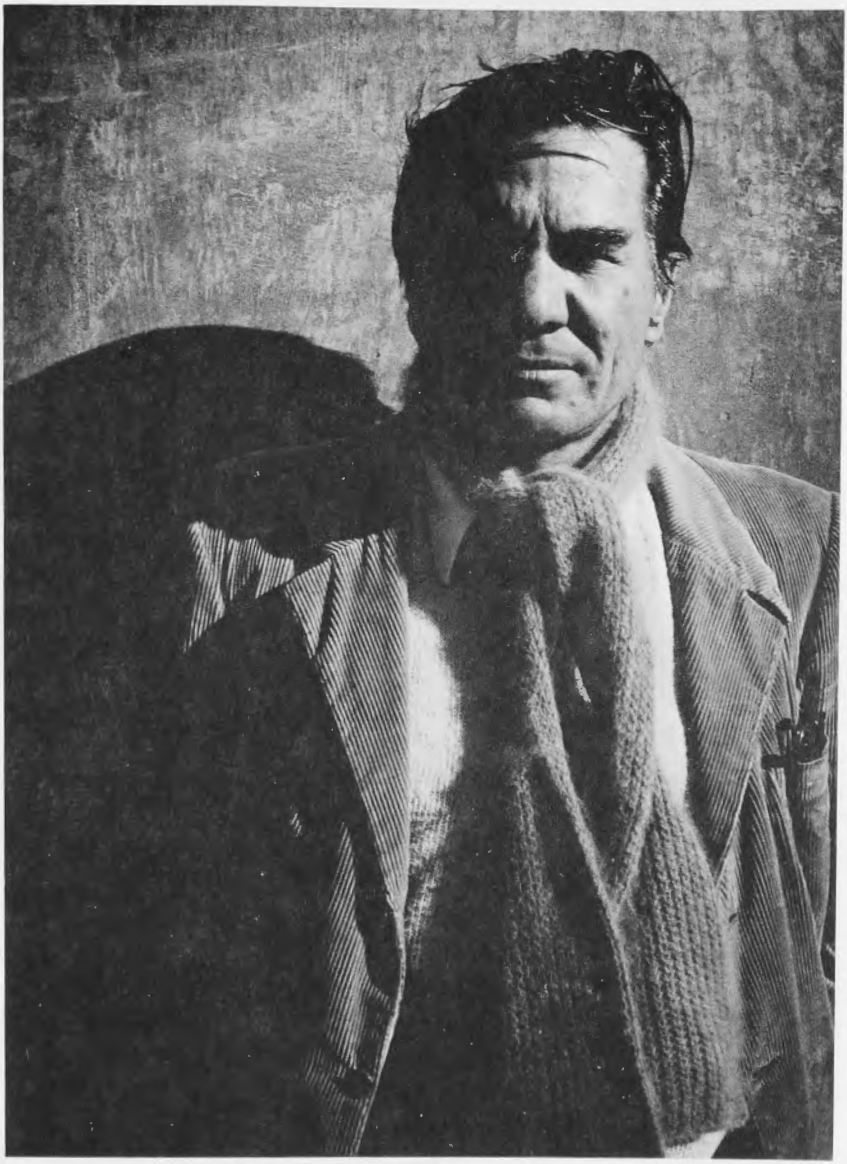
MAXINE HONG KINGSTON



ALLEN GINSBERG



JAMES DICKEY



GALWAY KINNEL

TWO SUITES

(Tr. from the Spanish by Jerome Rothenberg)

MIRROR SUITE

SYMBOL

Christ,
a mirror
in each hand.
He multiplies
his shadow.
He projects his heart
through his black
vision.
I believe!

THE GIANT MIRROR

We live beneath
a giant mirror.
Man is blue!
Hosanna!

REFLECTION

Lady Moon.
(Did someone shatter the quicksilver?)
No.
Which child flicked on
the lantern?
Even a butterfly could
blow it out.
Be quiet! (Can't really!)
That glowworm
is the moon!

RAYS

Everything's a fan.
Brother, open up your arms.
God is the pivot.

REPLICA

Only a single bird
is singing.
The air is cloning it.
We hear through mirrors.

EARTH

We walk on
an unsilvered

mirror,
a crystal surface
without clouds.
If lilies would grow
backwards,
if roses would grow
backwards,
if all those roots
could see the stars
& the dead not close
their eyes,
we would become like swans.

CAPRICHO

Behind each mirror
is a dead star
& a baby rainbow
sleeping.

Behind each mirror
is a blank forever
& a nest of silences
too young to fly.

The mirror is the mummy
of conceptions, closing
like a conch of light
at sunset.

The mirror
is the mother dew,
the book dissecting
twilights, echo become flesh.

SHINTO

Small golden bells.
Dragon pagoda.
Tinkle tinkle
from the rice fields.

Primal fountain.
Fountain of the real.

Far off,
pink-colored herons
& the spent volcano.

EYES

In our eyes the roads
are endless.
Two crossroads made
from shadows.
Death always emerging
from those secret fields.
A woman working a garden:
flowers like teardrops
she breaks.
Horizonless pupils.
Virgin forests
we're lost in.
Castle of no return
where you follow
the road that starts in the iris.
Oh boy without love, may God
set you free from red ivy.
And you, Elenita,
who sit here

embroidering ribbons,
keep clear of that traveler.

INITIUM

Adam & Eve.
The serpent cracked
the mirror
in a thousand pieces,
& the apple
was his rock.

BERCEUSE [CRADLE SONG] FOR A SLEEPING MIRROR

Sleep.
Do not fear the roaming
eye.
Sleep.

Not the butterfly,
the word
the furtive light
through the keyhole
will wound you.
Sleep.

As my heart is,
so you are,
my mirror.
Garden where my love

is waiting.

Sleep easy,
but awaken
when the last kiss dies against
my lips.

AIR

The air
pregnant with rainbows
shatters its mirrors
over the grove.

CONFUSION

Is my heart
your heart?
Who is mirroring my thoughts?
Who lends me this un-
rooted passion?
Why are my clothes
changing colors?
Everything is at a crossroads!
Why does this sludge
look so starry?
Brother, are you you
or am I I?
And these cold hands,
are they his?
I see myself in sunsets,
& a swarm of people

wanders through my heart.

POOL

Horned owl
stops his meditations,
cleans his meathooks,
sighs.
A firefly
spins downhill
& a star
slides by.
Old owl shakes his wings,
takes up his meditations.

April 15, 1921

IN THE FOREST OF CLOCKS

I entered the forest
of clocks.

Leaves were ticking,
bells hung in clusters.
Under a manyfaced clock,
constellations of pendulums.

Black lilies,
dead hours.
Black lilies,
new hours.

Doesn't matter!

And love?

Just this one hour,
one hour.
A very cold hour.

CHAPARRAL

I plunged into my
hour of death.
My deathrattle hour.
Hour of last kisses.
Grave hour when captive bells
dream.
    Cuckoo clocks
    without cuckoos.
    Mildewing star
    & enormous pale
    butterflies.

From brambles
of sighs
the crank-organ
sounded
that I had as a child.

You must skip to my loo,
my darling,
skip to my loo,
my love.

OVERVIEW

The whole murky forest is one
giant spider, spinning
a network of sounds
for its prey:
this poor lilywhite girl,
raised on glances & sighs.

HE

The real sphinx
is a clock.

Oedipus will be born from its eyes.

Its northern boundary
is mirror.
Its southern is cat.
Doña Luna is Venus.

Savorless sphere.

Clocks bring us
winter.

(Hieratic swallows
migrate in summer.)

Dawn is a floodtide
of clocks.

WHERE THE DREAM DIES OUT

Bats born from
spheres.
The cowhand scans them
deep in thought.

When will nightfall come
for all these clocks?
When will those white moons sink
under the hills?

CLOCK ECHO

I sat down
in a clearing in time.
It was a pool of silence.
A white pool.

Incredible ring,
where the bright stars collide
with a dozen floating
black numbers.

FIRST/LAST MEDITATION

Time
is in night's colors.
Quiet night.

Over enormous moons,
eternity
is set at twelve.
Time's gone to sleep
forever
in his tower.
All clocks
deceive us.

Time at last has
horizons.

THE SPHINX HOUR

In your garden the damned
stars open up.
We're born under your horns
& die there.

Cold hour!
You drop a stone roof
on these lyrical butterflies:
propped in your sky
you cut off their wings
& confine them.

One. . . two. . .three.
The hour struck in the forest.

The silence
filled up with bubbles.
A gold pendulum
carried my face
through the air.

The hour struck in the forest.
Pocket watches,
squadrons of flies,
came & went.

From my heart came the sound
of my grandmother's
gold-plated watch.

November 1922 (?)

NOTE

As a type of "serial poetry" (Blaser's and Spicer's term), the Lorca "suites" were begun at the end of 1920 and continued to mid-1923. Many remained unpublished during Lorca's lifetime and were later reassembled from notebooks, notably in André Belamich's critical edition, *Suites* (Editorial Ariel, Barcelona, 1983). When I first attended to the several that had surfaced earlier, they struck me as a different kind of Lorca than I had known before—still characteristically his but with a coolness & (sometimes) quirkiness, a language-centeredness & playfulness of mind & music that I found instantly attractive. "Mirrors" *["Suite de los espejos"]* was published in Juan Ramón Jiménez's magazine, *Indice,* in 1922, while "Clocks" *["La selva de los relojes"]* didn't come into print until 1938. These & further translations from the Suites will appear in the second volume of the comprehensive three-volume edition of Lorca's poetry to be published by Farrar Straus Giroux under the general editorship of Christopher Maurer.

[J. R.]

PHILIP GUSTON

DRAWING

UNTITLED
1968, Charcoal, 18" X 22.5"
Private Collection, NYC

MARJORIE WELISH

UNDERWORLD OVERCOAT: A NOTE ON THE LATE ART OF GUSTON

Once upon a time but not so long ago, seemingly one arts panel of every three dedicated itself to considering "The Individual in Society" and brooded long, and if not hard, then vociferously on the role of the creative outsider. Today it is often argued that tension between the values of individuality and conformity is gone. So now that the individual and society are synonymous, I wonder: May one feel nostalgic for alienation?

A retrospective of Philip Guston's drawings currently on view at The Museum of Modern Art raises that spectral question. Although a mere survey of the many hundreds Guston produced in his lifetime, this selection of 151 works on paper offers plenty of material with which to contemplate Guston's cyclical swing from depicting the neurosis of alienation to the neurosis of consensus and back again.

Like others of his generation in art, literature and music, Guston spent his formative years in the 1930s trying to give neoclassic validity to relevant social and political issues. But in these overtly political labors, it wasn't until the late 1960s, when he could rely on the accrued wisdom of Abstract Expressionism, that he evolved excellent work. In my view, the aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism helped his politics. Subjective and touched with a vigilance that borders on theory, to paraphrase Goethe, these palpitating abstractions conveyed more content—more political awareness, if you will—than any of the ideological murals that preceded them. And throughout his career, Guston's drawings always anticipate and define each stylistic phase.

Yet before and after his Abstract Expressionism, Guston remains evidently attached to and informed by the rhetoric of oppression associated with art and literature created between the Wars. Although biographers have mentioned Kafka as among the

literary influences on Guston's art, there also exists an affinity with Ernest Hemingway to my knowledge not yet mentioned.

Hemingway, a master of utilizing farce as a blunt instrument, begins his story "The Killers" (published in *Men Without Women,* 1927) thus:

> The door of Henry's lunch-room opened and two men came in. They sat down at the counter.
>
> "What's yours?" George asked them.
>
> "I don't know," one of the men said. "What do you want to eat, Al?"
>
> "I don't know," said Al. "I don't know what I want to eat."
>
> Outside it was getting dark. The street-light came on outside the window. The two men at the counter read the menu. From the other end of the counter Nick Adams watched. He had been talking to George when they came in.
>
> "I'll have a roast pork tenderloin with apple sauce and mashed potatoes," the first man said.
>
> "It isn't ready yet."
>
> "What the hell do you put it on the card for?"
>
> "That's the dinner," George explained. "You can get that at six o'clock."
>
> George looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter.
>
> "It's five o'clock."
>
> "The clock says twenty minutes past five," the second man said.
>
> "It's twenty minutes fast."
>
> "Oh, to hell with the clock," the first man said. "What have you got to eat?"

From props to affective tone, the scenarios drawn by Hemingway and Guston, in his first late figurative drawings and painting, suggest a shared rhetoric of oppression and its representation in art. Sublimity of space and time are shorn of consoling metaphysics: space is claustrophobic, time impoverished by petty displacement onto clocks and feeding schedules. Free will becomes trivialized through short-sighted goals: what's to eat and when.

As the fracas over the lunch menu heats up, so does the disarming vaudevillian routine:

> "I'll take ham and eggs," the man called Al said. He wore a derby hat and a black overcoat buttoned across the chest. His face was small and white and he had tight lips. He wore silk muffler and gloves.
>
> "Give me bacon and eggs," said the other man. He was about the same size as Al. Their faces were different, but they were dressed like twins. Both wore overcoats too tight for them. They sat forward, their elbows on the counter.

In both Hemingway and Guston are creatures arousing suspicion and identified as thugs by virtue of their not being characters but schema with flat affect. Myopic, literal-minded maneuvers finesse terror and the implication of unmotivated violence. Hemingway, as a modernist, supplies no cause, no explanation for a death that will arrive, inevitably and soon. Acutely aware of the fictive possibilities in reality already made grotesque and irrational, this journalist drew on his experience of politics seen firsthand. Already in 1922, as a columnist sent to Europe to cover political events in Italy, Hemingway produced an article "Mussolini, Europe's Prize Bluffer," in which he described the Fascists as "a sort of Ku Klux Klan," while, with macabre humor, epitomized the danger of Mussolini by a sartorial mistake: his wearing black shirts together with white spats.

Like the twinned dumb executioners in *The Trial* who come to get K and without a word escort him to his death, the tyranny Guston personifies in his paintings and drawings is cousin to an ethos represented as capricious and absolute as Kafka's and Hemingway's. Hence Guston is presupposing a scenario found not only in hard-boiled fiction enlisting reportage typical of documentary realism, and he is presupposing as well a world that equates objectivity with materialistic vice—the vision of Expressionist drama. More than a shared vocabulary, this assumed topos of the underworld constituted a legacy of a politically left bohemia vital in both Europe and America in the 1920s.

But what I want to note here is Guston's bonding with this period and its sordid aftermath. In response to American political

hubris in Vietnam and assassination and violence at home, Guston seeks some contemporary expression of actuality for the 1970s yet chooses for that reality an amalgam of a settled progressiveness of Synthetic Cubism and the conservative yet unsettling idiom of de Chirico. (Guston is not alone among his generation in reverting to a former 20th-century period for a contemporary political statement: for instance, in the decade that saw the publication of *The Organization Man* Lester Johnson had created phalanxes of electric-blue bowlered silhouettes marching across yolk-yellow space to imply that a gangland mentality may be the unwanted obverse of individual anonymity.)

So while much has been made of the au courant relevance of Guston's political statements of the 1970s, Guston's actuality is also more profoundly historicizing and literary. In his late Hemingwayesque romance with the period between the Wars, doubtless he was sincere, but it must be admitted that he produced better statements of conscience—and much better art—after he left explicit social comment behind. The personal magic of Abstract Expressionism had worked well for him. Having rejected it in order to communicate, as he put it, "a deeper meaning," Guston was mistaken if he thought his dehumanized cartoons of Klansman necessarily deeper than his Abstract Expressionist gesture. Only when he pressed beyond an historicism staffed with Klansman and easy existential paraphernalia did subject matter give way to the deeper meaning of content, the very existential content of his previous Abstract Expressionism: vigilance, mortality, and after—an eternity of feeling in which, as in Kafka and Hemingway, guilt is a given.

The wonder of it all is that once beyond the set-pieces of alienation, in his best still later works—*Friend—To M.F.* and *Web,* for instance—even a slight period cast does not cushion anxiety. Nor is agonizing nakedness a bit diminished by association with an ethos of the familiar past.

D. E. STEWARD

SEPTEMBER

Blue, so parulas or ceruleans, possibly blue-winged, merest glimpse in the high oak foliage

Listening to patriotic litanies. Taking you into their confidence, "Communism is what we're really all talking about, right?" Like listening to old Nazis

Real-estate people say the first thing a couple invariably does when they take possession of a house they've bought is copulate in it

Property

Cerulean is the color of the sky on a bright cloudless day, deep blue or azure

To pass our winter below the two thousand meter level on the Andes western slopes, while the blue-winged migrate no farther than to Nicaragua

At the top of a lane flanked by loose lava stone walls, Laguna San Pablo below Volcán Imbabura, northern Ecuador, a five- or six-year-old girl, filthy raspberry sweater, dirty face, matted hair, bad shoes, eager but with no string to hold across the road to extract toll as had the other kids nearby, and when I walked back the thirty yards from where we parked, she was gone far, far up the volcano, a half a mile away and two hundred feet up, running, running toward a tiny farm

Bright peacock blue, the most brilliant of greenish blues

After Bolivia, the subcontinent of Brazil, then Argentina

The clear pushed-reeds of a bandoneon, mainstay of the tango

Blue ultramarine ash is a strong to vivid greenish blue

Tierra Argentina with that style, all hats exactly right, shiny leather, all those hides, all that beef, all those Italian craftsmen, all that sense of place, Córdoba, Mendoza, Paraná

Black earth seedbed for the criollo dream

The scudding cumulus, the maté gourds, the bolas coiled

Enigmatic smile from beneath her umbrella cocked like a parasol, equipment from her culture as surely as wine glass in hand is French, quiet curiosity Chinese

Gentle rain

New age and celestial space music. Star magic fusion schlock

Get a haircut, put on a coat and tie, go out and get a job

Columbia blue, pale, redder and deeper than average powder blue or Sistine and redder, stronger, and slightly darker than average cadet gray

Go to the Galápagos? Most never go to another continent, many never to another country, a few never leave their home state or province

In travel you rarely get another chance

Reddish moon rise, high sky, acacia shadow dream

Berlioz wrote *Harold in Italy* for Paganini who wanted a new work for viola, but he rejected it, saying the viola solos were not prominent enough. Paganini also played guitar, even wrote three string quartets with guitar part

Twenty wood warbler species in Columbia that never make their way to North America. One, the gray-throated, is like our mourning warbler but does not migrate at all, is restricted to humid forest and forest edge. "Not well known. May now be rare in much of range due to habitat loss"

Lavender blue is a light to brilliant purplish blue

Querencia

My rucksack's leather shoulder strap cusped by a cane rat I caught at it by my head one night in a stilted house in Sorsogon

Bicol

Midnight or midnight blue, a variable color averaging a blackish blue that is greener and stronger than Romany

Thunderous piano, recorded unenhanced, unaided

Romany is a blackish blue, is redder and less strong than average midnight

She drives across Cairo daily, Heliopolis to Giza. Down the 23rd July, onto Ramses, across the Zamalik Bridge, and then El Bahr el Ama along the river toward the zoo

Twelve million now in the city alone, congested toward constriction

Life and death in El-Mansûra, Lower Egypt, on the Damietta branch of the Nile

"People look ten years younger here than people of equal age at home in Egypt"

Two hundred and five million mother-tongue Arabic speakers in the world

Calamine blue, a light greenish blue, greener, lighter, stronger than robin's-egg blue, bluer and deeper than aqua, and bluer and lighter than turquoise

With a population like Spain's, thirty-seven million, the Sahel is ten times Spain's size with an economy but four percent as large

Not unlike a young cork forest or a flat plain olive grove from the air, but on the ground a lightly shaded hell

Infrequent lizards flashing, no other motion, cracks in the earth, stretching away, and after nightfall the absolute quiet of nothingness

It might be, in the manner that South American urban life foreshadows the ways most people everywhere will live by the time the century is out, that the Sahel lies as a Precambrian model for the inner human condition of how most exist right now

A large space on the map

Cyan, any of a group of colors of greenish blue hue, medium lightness, and high saturation. One of the subtractive primaries

Manaus, founded 1660, its air temperature never goes below eighty, over a million people now

The Cultural Revolution's Ox-Ghost Ranch in Shanghai, another kind of camp

Men's heads were shaved weekly at the Ox-Ghost Ranch, their humiliation was more complete than anyone not in Shanghai at the time can ever know

"The abject patience of the oppressed, evidently, is one of history's inexplicable facts" *(Points for a Compass Rose)*

Steel blue is any of the translucent colors assumed by steel at various temperatures in tempering

Mao's Red Guard, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge

Zaffer or zaffre or zaffree or zaffar or zaffir is smalt

Starch blue is smalt. Smalt is a moderate blue redder and duller than copen, redder and deeper than azurite blue, Dresden blue, or pompadour, and greener and deeper than luster blue. Smalt and starch blue are the same as cobalt glass, Dumont's blue, king's blue.

"I eat and I don't care. Ice cream, bread and butter. I'm up to one-sixty. I like it. You don't know how difficult being a woman in this country is now"

The intense turquoise of a late-summer leafhopper roaming night window glass ventrally in a reading light's bright

Know little about insects, less about plants and flowers

Worked for the US Forest Service for years and don't know much about trees

Japanese lantana in the National in Washington, soft orange to blue within the same rounded clusters, tiny and exact in the Alhambra water-gurgle silence of the domed courts

Twenty miles on a bicycle in air so calm as to be like walking up the stairs

The wrinkled mountains on maps and globes evoke the tingling, but do not suggest the awesome voids from peak to peak or the scale of summits

The Andes are finally familiar. Now only the Himalayas and the Pamirs, and the Antarctic peaks

Ease of travel one of the chief privileges of the era, cheapness of commercial jet aviation, smoothness of the freeways and the interstates

He eats with his off thumb high and shiny from shoveling it in. For the first time I understand Greasy Thumb, that enigmatic nickname of a 50s gangster

Loosing the thread of his life

One eyebrow droops, his puffing on the stairs, his readiness to sit down and rest at every chance he gets

Smoking, eating instead of smoking but still smoking, he will die of his fat before his lungs go

An electric storm so black that we pulled off beneath an overpass on I-95

Night blue is dark and grayish, greener and paler than indigo. Black is black, sooty, coal bin cobweb, low scrape, that storm was black

Boundless sense of well-being in outside air that is still, humid, and the temperature of the tropical ocean

Fells Point: Baltimore clippers built here, only crab-cake sandwiches now, went out to China with missionaries and Bibles flying topgallants and royals, skysails and moonrakers, those clouds of sails, and brought back silk and pearls

Crystal City, Seven Corners, Vietnamese commerce on Wilson Boulevard

The depths of Lake Baikal

The passage of migrating birds in fall

Fleeing the weather that is coming as though packs of dogs were running them, as though a chasm were filling the sky behind

Quebec City's hard stone grace

Retreat South below scudding early morning rain showers to the Line, leaving limitless Canada again

Unknown symphonies by forgotten composers, as sad as all serious novels that have gone to dust

Stone black valley of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall

Roslyn blue is Mazarine blue which is a deep purplish blue slightly redder than hyacinth blue, redder and paler than average sapphire, and redder, lighter, and stronger than cyanine blue

Spending time with cocksure Marxists or nonchalant Republicans or stolid sociobiologists, the same, like hours in the rain

Middle and Eastern European public buildings, vermiculated stonework, vermicular concrete buttresses

Songs lost, forgotten books

Ox gall was used for the marbling of books

Modular Amorite craftwork from Syria, cut green stone, ceramic repeats, gold, from four thousand years ago

Lapis lazuli

Fox fairy seductresses in Chinese myth and legend. Nearly all cultures resent things independently feminine, ridicule such wondrousness, trivialize such strength

Stereotypical character types replaced now with sameness of color and shape, decoration modular, packaged, set, and when it is something else is self-consciously pagan and crudely stark

Computer graphics decorations printed with no more texture than the finish on the cover of a magazine or the surface of a television screen

Almost no stereotypical character roles now, each of us is simultaneously alone and the same, our dark glasses and black clothes, our hair on end, our quiet privacy

The brown darkness and the absolute cultural centrality of the Plaza de San Francisco in Quito

Salient places in the world

Mouths of the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Brahmaputra, to the Sundarbans, flooding flooded drowned, much of the the country drowned

Cobalt is the azure of the cloudless sky

Apparently during six years in the Mexican Presidency, Lopez Portillo stole three billion, three hundred million dollars

La mordida

Space appears to fold back wider than below the Line, air stir lifts chilly breezes, oblique light blangs off flattened grass. No limits and no hedging inclusivities. Possible in Canada to swing around and walk North forever beyond banality into oblivion

Having shot through the dry green of the high oaks outside making for a patch of reflected sky, one Philadelphia vireo lies window glass dead on the balcony

Lost from the billions of passerines streaming southward, of which nearly half will have died before they return

Twenty miles on a bicycle to Pennsylvania into a strong headwind, two hours of down-geared ear-rush stubbornness

Windsor blue, a grayish purplish blue that is redder and paler than average delft and redder, lighter, and stronger than average navy blue

Deeply civilized for six thousand years

Muqattam, the oldest quarter in Cairo, up against the yellow rocky hill

Four months every summer on the beach in Alexandria, these days a beach house in Masa Matru, a long drive from Alexandria beyond El Alamein on the road to Libya. Nothing but sand, the highway, the railway and the sea

Jouvence blue, a moderate bluish green to greenish blue, deeper than gendarme or cyan blue and duller than parrot blue

The late September weather hinge

"She is overly polite, and she is doing terrible things to me in Japanese"

Morning fog

The clouds in the high mountain valleys around Quito lacked luminosity in August, light was not coming through them but around and past them, and when they opened the sunshine was total

Quechua

Indigo carmine is a strong greenish blue that is bluer and duller than grotto, greener and duller than cobalt blue, and greener and darker than average cerulean blue—called also chemic blue, duck blue

Those who are wise enjoy mountains, those who are kind enjoy water

The yellow rocky hill

Tired yellow leaves, the birches, the ash

JANET KAUFFMAN

WOMEN OVER BAY CITY

And then they came down, all of the women, and settled in the field. Only the long necks showed above stubble.

He thought, what of it? What difference does it make if I move or don't move? He didn't move.

And more of them, beyond what he had imagined, appeared over the highway. At first they were birds. But then, they were not birds. Their arms arched, slung away from the body, pulled back. They were synchronous as a flock. Lowering out of the sky, they turned first into the wind, and then circled, lower, around, and once more into the wind. Their hair blew out across their shoulders, or lifted in coarse strands. They had thin, wild bodies. He noticed the tendons pull through their necks, and he noticed the nacreous sheen of their knees, the caps of bone. They had breasts like drawings of breasts, half-circles on brown paper.

As they approached and turned themselves into the field, arms lowering more, stiffening, he registered the disturbance they made in the air. The push of wind. Their legs angled forward, the thighs taut. Then the feet turned up, and he understood the aerodynamic precision of their landing. He breathed sharply through his nose, to catch a scent.

They came in by the thousands.

What could there be in the field but stubble? Remnants. After the harvest had taken place, whenever that was, the broken-up stalks had bleached out and shattered. The leaves were not leaves but streamers of crepe, blown around, brittle.

If they came here for food, that was something new for the books. He couldn't think what it would be.

Besides, having landed, they stood absolutely still, their bodies obscured except for the long necks, the small heads, dark with the sun behind them, like new plants, or dried pods. No one would notice, happening by at this moment.

He knew it was chance—that he'd seen anything.

The women didn't feed. They didn't move.

Oh, I have seen women pull a lot of stunts, he thought. But nothing like this. I believe I'm a lucky man.

After a while, with the sun continuing, an idea poured through his mind, over his shoulders. He wrapped himself in it.

He wondered how long a man could live, without moving a muscle.

He breathed so slowly, air moved in its ordinary way around his face, undisturbed. He had already sworn to himself: I'll stay. Something will happen. One of them, sooner or later, will take off. Or speak.

EUROPERAS 1 & 2: SYNOPSES

The two Europeras were originally performed in Frankfurt in December, 1987. Separate programs were available for each performance, and the synopses were distributed randomly, one per program, so that different members of the audience had different synopses to follow. These are all twelve of the alternative pairs.

1

He, unhappy at her apparent indifference toward him, brings her captive to the Temple of the Holy Grail. Another man also loves her, accusing her of witchcraft. She expresses but a lifeless automaton—who should have reported to jail for a minor offense. Disguising himself in exchange for his love, they are condemned as traitors. Conveniently, he flees to an inn on the Lithuanian border.

2

Exhausted, he is beset by his daughter who was once his wife. Her cousin, however, loves her; he resolves to be succored by her frequently. He is invited to utter the fearful renunciation. She having already independently accepted, dies of fright. Another woman, his wife calls her her new mentor, but he is convinced of her guilt. Her wish is granted by them and out steps the beautiful Queen. He threatens to tell how.

1

He, the nephew of a rich old bachelor, arouses him to obtain admittance to the palace, and, in return for safe passage, names him commander of the Holy Grail. Even her loving relatives feel a

strange sympathy near his ship. First, he sounds the alarm, but she is tempted by the weaponless hero to hold him to a marriage contract. At the second alarm, he disguises himself after giving her wedding an unsuccessful attempt at a life of pleasure. She flees commanding a pardon for his bride, who has hidden herself to die with her hand on him.

2

She falls in love for reasons of state. He comes across her in search of adventure. At her birthday ball through rose-colored glasses he discusses plans to continue their search for a loan. In fact, he decides to join the governor who kills his friend. The two enemies wrest the sword from the tree, joining the protest against paying the fee. He assembles the court and tells his story. She manages to avoid being alone with him.

▲

1

The sensitive girl is planning the defense of the forest in the city protected for years by the young man she engages secretly. She, longing for him, deepens her despair, and is sent to marry his best friend. Soon his duty, however, utters the prophecy to lure him with the lawyer's child guarding them against background and antecedents he has signed. She dies. He has meanwhile bought his army contract by proclaiming himself her son. He is so young; this enables him to resist once again.

2

Dressed as an Irish princess, he gives birth; they plot to overthrow the French. He arranges to be kidnapped by her; rejuvenated, they desert: to him she has borne two children. He prays for help. Since they have decided she shall marry no one outside, he has himself crowned Emperor. She, told he is dead, begs him to look at her. First, before the young couple come to a climax, he agrees. Accidentally, she drowns them.

▲

1

He ignores the warnings at one of her brilliant supper parties when as astrologer arrives terrified by pangs of conscience. He brings the Oracle's word that their friends still refuse their friends. In despair, she seeks him to take a light from him. At the second alarm, he steps forward, confessing his love for her. She is unbeatable. His total innocence, sounded by his one-time friend, takes her off his hands. Her brief rage of jealousy in the end sets sail. In a golden coach, he commends her soul to heaven.

2

He, in love, is spurned as a suitor. He determines to learn the stories of his past in revenge. She waits. Two slaves discover her. Convinced she must ask the forbidden question, they meet. He gathers all his strength after the party breaks up, realizing he may never marry her. They finally convert him, swearing eternal friendship. He apologizes to her.

▲

1

He and she are betrothed when he hails her rigidly his. He also promises his friend that she'll play up to him plotting revenge. The gun accidentally fires reminding him of the Holy Spear. He offers the giants his mother, and they are married. They play at cards in his room despite her warning. Meanwhile he led her at the dwarf's urging to repent, and then to find, to kill, and to take.

2

He has left her; she is accused by him and the populace, except the innkeeper. He arranges for battle with the Moors. Killing the old man, one condition is imposed: traditional hospitality. He, disguised as a student, kills the governor. She flees. He kills the giant; she kills herself. Her funeral cortege appears. Refusing to join her, he forgives them, making a fool of himself. A strange hermit appears.

▲

1

She after a long life has fallen in his palace, and consequently refuses plans to marry. He bemoans her absence. She asks for many pranks and much confusion. It is love at first sight; however, he expresses himself later and is banished. Their mood is suddenly dead; she sends him away.

2

They are in love. Raised in a cave, he vows to reveal his identity, thus freeing her to refuse his son's request. They tell him he is invited to take holy order. Transforming himself into a monstrous dragon, with the evil one's help they meet. Twenty-five years pass. He repents. She manages to make him yield, but in the end remains completely docile; she returns.

▲

1

He is in a group of witches and plans to starve; she sells her expert cardplayer; people pray for him to be awakened. Discovered, she succeeds in making him meet only secretly with her. The wedding is imposed: if he offers her younger sister her former sweetheart who has rescued her, he cannot resist her gods. He steps forward and they join, released from their vows. He, believing her to be enlightened, reveals the virtues of her way, and suddenly plunders the Temple with his last bullet. He is satisfied.

2

He has promised his daughter active resistance; she lives disguised as a sea captain. He curses his bride who has been adopted by a band of Gypsies. She feels a strange sympathy for his father. She succumbs to him. They flee. She prevents him from meeting her in the garden; he is furious; she is total innocence. He transforms himself on his ship, which swiftly sets sail. Distraught, he orders, forgives, sets fire to it.

▲

1

She gains admittance to the palace. He accepts a commission to outwit the two lovers. However, she kills him at her feet and assists the lawyer who cannot resist her invitation to the palace. He tries prayers. He displays a white dove and wins the hand of the princess.

2

On a public bench, he falls in love; however, her father, an evil magician, died, giving birth to him. He is in fact his son, her delight. Soon his duty calls him away to guard them against danger she quickly forgets. Though he renounces his vows, he accepts and they are married. Face to face, the two can see no way out; in his room, she flees when he obeys an inexplicable impulse. Desperately, he asks her to run away with him. She appears half-crazed, makes the sign of the cross, thereby destroying him and his castle.

▲

1

He falls deeply in love with a beautiful streetsinger who staggers into the hut. He buys a love potion. Her candle goes out and impressed by his wealth she decides to marry him on the spot. The wound reveals that after three years he will have himself crowned Emperor with the evil one's help in exchange for his love. At first she flees; whereupon he gathers all his strength, becomes passionately attached and begs a hermit's refuge.

2

She sells his soul to her father with the aim of improving his impaired finances. Even her loving relatives are shocked. They rescue him. He retires. She agrees. Torn, they, in shame, pardon all conspirators. He agrees to marry her. She kills herself. He is chosen the victor.

▲

1

She is the tragedy that has happened. He confides his love and he says he is himself a father. He plots to marry no one. The victim hides the stature of salvation if they rob her and the high priests, but when she learns the ceremony is a fake she kills his friend, who accepted his duplicity in vain since they had informed him of his death. He kills her on the battlefield.

2

The villagers celebrate; an astrologer arrives lamenting the death of his wife. She appears rejuvenated; she informs him that the gods have taken pity on him: she loves him. His fears reach a climax: her candle goes out. Doubtful of his love if he knows the truth, she nevertheless enters the royal household intercepted by the King's minister, who renounces his plan to rob her. She, in love with love, is penniless. He asks her to run away with the King. She goes mad; he, impressed, urges revenge.

▲

1

He is happy with the court life and is in love with her; he ignores her apparent indifference toward him. He meets with the Turks a visiting knight who says to forget his stepmother and enlist his help. Actually, he returns disguised as a monk on Christmas Eve. She soon denounces him to his friend, each time they accept his traveling companion. To circumvent discovery in his dark tomb, she marries him; they are surprised to win.

2

He arouses her (they are about to be married): he threatens to kill his mother. She expresses her delight; now his brother has presumably been thrown into the flames. At her birthday ball, he is very careful. After the bloody deed is done, she, remorseful, returns. The two exchange ecstatic pledges. Nevertheless he is dying. He offers his life to the gods.

▲

1

She is bored with most men; he is in love with her. He accepts a preliminary trial hoping to find a way. She persuades him to give her his life. He dies. Now in his dark tomb, he goes to her rescue. She reawakens his love early in the morning.

2

He lusts after her; she has died, his only hope of redemption. In his despondency he maintains his reserve, accepts the bird. He fulfills the second part of the witches' prophecy: They rescue him quickly. He loses his power. He falls prey to another man's wife. Once more he invokes Venus (he is first to admit it); in vain: her life is over. He wishes; he refuses. Thoroughly embittered, he rails.

FOUR DETAILS FROM PAINTINGS

DETAIL FROM "THREE SEATED BLACK MEN"
1986, 120" X 156"
Photo by David Reynolds
Courtesy of Barbara Gladstone
Gallery, NYC

DETAIL FROM "INTERROGATION IV"
1986, 120" X 146"
Photo by David Reynolds
Courtesy of Hans Neuendorf
Gallery, Frankfurt

DETAIL FROM "MERCENARIES IV"
1980
Photo by Diana Church
Courtesy of Barbara Gladstone Gallery, NYC

DETAIL FROM "WHITE SQUAD III"
1982
Photo by David Reynolds
Courtesy of Barbara Gladstone Gallery, NYC

As of this issue, *Sulfur* becomes A Literary Bi-Annual of the Whole Art, and will appear twice a year (instead of three times a year), with issues in November and April. Subscription rates will change as of January, 1989.

"ETERNITY, DEATH AND GRAMMAR:" THE IN ZIKH POETS—AMERICAN YIDDISH MODERNISM*

> "Yiddish has not yet said its last word. . .It was the tongue of martyrs and saints, of dreamers and kabbalists—rich in humor and in memories that mankind may never forget. In a figurative way, Yiddish is the wise and humble language of us all, the idiom of frightened and hopeful humanity."
>
> —Isaac Bashevis Singer, 1978 Nobel Lecture

In 1923, the editors of *In Zikh,* the leading modernist Yiddish literary journal, received a correspondence from *Poetry,* its counterpart in the English-language community. "Unfortunately, we cannot read your journal. We would like to know in what language it is printed. Is it Chinese?" The anonymous *In Zikh* editor, after noting the existence of several Chicago-based Yiddish newspapers and numerous Windy City Chinese laundries, angrily asked its readers "How long will Yiddish literature be unknown among Gentiles? How long will they think of us—in literature—as Hottentots?" At that time, after nearly fifty years of a modern Yiddish literary tradition, the literary achievements that occasionally received translation into English or German—such as Sholom Aleichem or proletarian

* A review of *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology,* edited by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav. Translations by the editors, Kathryn Hellerstein, Brian McHale, and Anita Norich. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

poet Morris Rosenfeld—were still regarded with condescending regard, much in the way Black writers such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes were viewed by the American literary community. Even within the Jewish community, the Yiddish writer had his critics. To the assimilationist and the Communist, Yiddish was a badge of narrow nationalism and tribalism. For the radical Zionist, Yiddish was the language of the Diaspora, the jargon of a culture forced to live away from its homeland. The Communist and Zionist often saw Yiddish as only suitable for popular literature and political pamphlets. The decision to write in Yiddish, particularly for writers who were comfortable in two or three other languages, contained an immanent statement about the belief in the value of nearly a thousand years of Yiddish culture—that it was neither a culture of exiles nor a distorted version of European and classical Hebrew values.

American Yiddish Poetry offers a comprehensive introduction to one of the most fascinating episodes in the history of Yiddish literature—the Modernist movement as interpreted by American Yiddish poets. In a break from anthologies that survey Yiddish poetry, such as the excellent *Penguin Anthology of Yiddish Verse,* the editors have chosen to focus on seven poets who they felt represented the range of Yiddish modernism. Instead of skimming through the literature (the usual effect of most anthologies), we are presented with three book-length selections and four selections that could easily be made into chapbooks.

The poets of Yiddish modernism represent the culmination of a literary tradition that had only begun in the 1880s. As the Ashkenazic Jew slowly entered into the mainstream of cultural activity in the wake of the abolition of much of the discriminatory repressive edicts that had kept him isolated and culturally static, a body of writing appeared that, while Jewish thematically, represented a new European literature.

The first school of modern Yiddish poets to arise were "the sweatshop poets." Poets such as Morris Rosenfeld and Dovid Edelshtat spoke to the difficult experiences of the many Jews who emigrated to America. True proletarian poets who labored in factories, these writers were published in the Yiddish labor papers, recited their verse at union rallies and were regarded as heroes by an immigrant community suffering under the weight of rapid cultural disintegration and enforced proletarianization.

Within a decade after the publication of Rosenfeld's 1898 *Songs of The Ghetto,* a much translated volume of archetypal "sweatshop" verse, a new Yiddish poetry arose in reaction to the sentimental and sometimes crude verse of an earlier generation. The poets of *Di Yunge* (often referred to in English as the *Young Generation)* reflected the solidification of Jewish life in America. The Lower East Side of Manhattan was the focus

of its burgeoning intellectual community. At Goodman & Levine's Cafe the poets of *Di Yunge* were found on most nights after 11. Smitten by the romanticism of Rilke and Hofmannsthal, these poets rejected the cultural and political demands that earlier Yiddish poets felt obligated to fulfill in their writing. At their best, as witnessed in the poetry of H. Leyvik and Mani Leyb, they created exquisitely formed poems, deeply rooted in personal vision. They purified their Yiddish, eliminating the Germanisms that earlier writers used as a short cut to profundity as well as the biblical/rabbinic references that many poets used because of the instant communication they had with the reader. In attempting to expand the Yiddish worldview, translations from the Japanese, Chinese, Egyptian and Arabic appeared in the magazine of *Di Yunge*. In the midst of the wretchedly crowded Lower East Side, these factory-worker poets—most too "pure" to publish in the Yiddish newspaper (the common route of the Yiddish poet)—dreamed themselves unrecognized followers of the tradition of Pushkin and Blok, writing small tone poems against a tradition that stressed immediacy and, often, bombast. Maturing in the wake of the failed 1905 Russian Revolution, their collective tone was that of resignation and world-weariness and their stance of art for art's sake helped turn Yiddish poetry into a minority literature. By the end of World War I, *Di Yunge's* stance seemed even more precious in the light of that shattering war and the political and artistic events following in its wake.

*

> In the grayness of New York's lime kiln, in the shadowy shimmer of East Broadway and in the insolent artistic night life of Broadway; here, where everyone "makes a living" *for himself* cut off from any milieu which might look up reverently to the white hands of a poet; here, where a poet walks unnoticed like a shadow through New York streets, is squeezed into subways and elevated along with everyone else, returns home soiled at night with everyone else—in this lime kiln, several young people sense instinctively that their own liberation is not with the liberation of the group, that they, as individuals, are still drowning in the bile of their own suffering. [. . .]
>
> And the young man, cut off from his home, in the smoke of a city which has not yet mixed with his blood, suddenly senses his own personal misfortune and feels that *"I*—am lost forever. . ." (Zisho Landoy)
>
> —Jacob Glatshteyn, *A Quick Run Through Yiddish Poetry,* In Zikh, January 1920

1920: Weine's *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* is released and Marcel Duchamp makes his first abstract film. In Cologne, visitors to an exhibit of Dadaist art are permitted to smash the paintings. On the literary scene, Carl Sandburg's best and most influential volume, *Smoke and Steel,* is published. Meyerhold opens his own theatre in Moscow. Politically, the 19th (Women's Suffrage) Amendment is ratified in the U.S. and the Red Army defeats the combined forces of the White Russians and Allied Expeditionary force, solidifying the Bolsheviks' position of power. And in Pittsburgh, the first commercial radio station commences to broadcast a regular schedule of programs.

Also in 1920 the *In Zikh* movement turns against the dominant *Di Yunge* poetry and begins to create an *American* Yiddish poetry, a poetry that reflects the upheaval and pure optimism in that period after WW I and before the Great Depression. The *In Zikh* poet was facing a rapidly changing Jewish community. The heart of Yiddish culture, the Lower East Side, was losing its Jewish population to rapidly forming communities in Brooklyn and The Bronx, a move that began with the subway expansion into New York's outer boroughs during WW I. As a whole generation of first born American Jews came of age, many of them began rejecting the "Old World" culture of their parents and turned towards the opportunities in the secular, Gentile world. Although there was still much Yiddish theatre, fiction and, even, a Yiddish cinema, the excitement of a vital national culture was giving way to a more sentimental and didactic art.

Jacob Glatshteyn (1896–1971) was the leading theoretician of the *In Zikh* movement, as well as one of the greatest poets to write in Yiddish. Like many of his circle, he came to America as a teenager, and came to maturity as an American. He received a traditional Talmudic education in his native Lublin, Poland, yet, four years after emigrating, was acclimated enough to his new homeland to attempt an uncompleted law degree at New York University. His first book, *Jacob Glatshteyn* (1921), was the first book of Yiddish poetry written entirely in free verse, and, equally important, broke with the whole tradition of Yiddish literature with its ahistoric and urbanist slant:

PROPERTY

At the bolted doors of the crumbs of property
Shadows of the storekeeps watch all night.
At six in the morning the shadows slither home,
To wake their bosses
for the day-dance over the crumbs of property.
But my shadow watches the night-silver of the moon
On the peak of Woolworth

And at dawn my shadow brings me
A piece of raw gold from the fresh sun.

(p. 215)

Glatshteyn was well aware of the field of writing that the Modernists created. Translations of Eliot's *Wasteland,* Pound's *Cantos* and works by other Modernists had appeared in *In Zikh* journals. Glatshteyn particularly admired James Joyce, having gone as far as writing a piece in the manner of *Finnegan's Wake* entitled *If Joyce Had Written in Yiddish.* His experimental writing culminates with the 1937 volume *Exegyddish,* one of the most brilliant achievements of Yiddish poetry:

In sad dissolution rust quotations
Of bugographs.
Dear Matilda, sing me a lemon of sedate aphorisms
And howtolives.
Tatters of silence, crucified emptiness.
Throbbing, I race to comic sophistical finish.
In wishy-washy meantime

(Dissolution, p. 273)

Shortly after the publication of this volume, "Goodbye World," his most famous poem, is published. A trip to Europe in 1934 alerted him to the possibility of the destruction of European Jewry and by '38, the most cosmopolitan of Yiddish writers would write "A ban, world, on your unclean cultures. / Though all is desolate / I roll in your dust, / Gloomy Jewish life." He emerges in the wake of the Holocaust as the great "national" poet of the Yiddish language, confronting the enormity of the loss of Jewish culture in the most typically Jewish manner, writing against it. The American poet his career most parallels is Kenneth Rexroth, both having abandoned the avant-garde for the difficult role of a public conscience. But even as an older man, facing the eventual extinction of Yiddish culture, the lessons he learned in the heady days of the twenties could rise with startling power: "The television-pane reflected my every word / with a blow of laughter."

Glatshteyn's cohort, Moyshe-Leyb Halpern (1886–1932), was lucky enough to die young and avoid the role of witness to the destruction of European Judaism. A political poet whose politics were somewhat existentialist/anarchist and decidedly non-party line, Halpern's ironic and wry poetry made him a much-beloved figure among his fellow poets and his readers. In Halpern's poetry, we also find the finest examples of what the Harshavs call "talk-poems," the form that free-verse takes on in Yiddish. Mimicking the Yiddish conversational style, talk-poems were often

long and wildly discursive, making great associative jumps and leaping back and forth between thematic threads. In *How Long Will I Stand,* Halpern's meditation upon finding a dead woman in the streets (then, as now, not an unusual occurrence in the Lower East Side) transforms the experience into memories of his father and the village he left in Galicia:

> Whether I went, and how far, I don't know anymore.
> Perhaps I just wandered around like this, to and fro,
> In the rain. I am sure that I read on a signboard somewhere
> That the smoke of Havana Cigars is pleasant and mild
> Like the breathing of mothers on babies that cry in the night,
> And it seems (if I am not mistaken) that store is three blocks
> Away from that place. I am even sure that I saw
> The boxes displayed in the window, though it was dark.
> And I cried—I remember this too. I stood, and I read,
> And swaying like this in the rain, with eyes open I cried.
> And then I imagined I heard a voice calling aloud:
> My father while dying; which reminded me how, long ago,
> He cried at the train when I left and how pale was his face—
> It seems that he sensed he would never see me again.
> How heavy your heart when you stand and ponder like this
> On a father a corpse, near a woman a stranger, who's dead.
> (p. 475)

Berysh Vaynshteyn's (1905–1967) wild, long-lined poems of New York life appear to be spiritual heirs of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl.* He called his first book *Brukhstiker* (1936)—"Junk" or, more literally, "Broken Pieces." Although Irving Howe compares him to Carl Sandburg, it appears that Walt Whitman and, perhaps, Kenneth Fearing are greater influences. The plight of America's Black population seems to have affected him deeply and in the poem "Laundry" he describes their work-day in a commercial laundry:

> In the dark abyss of wetness, cauldrons flame with a zesty glow
> and heat;
> Naked arms from bare hairy chests throw wet coals.
> From the heavy fire their bodies gleam against the open heat,
> seared in the blaze.
> Their scorched skins crack dryly after each bow of the shovel.

Judd (J.L.) Teller (1912–1972) appeared to be more at home in America than most Yiddish poets. A brilliant Talmudic scholar (his teachers included the father of painters Moses and Raphael Soyer), he also earned

a Ph.D. in psychology from Columbia University. Long a prominent figure in the American Zionist movement, he wrote numerous books in English on political and historical subjects. His book *Miniatures* (1934) reflects the influence of Objectivist poetics:

ON THE ROAD
Wind hinders your walk,
Chokes you like smoke.
Mountains gleam
With a distant sun and cold rivers.
You are lonely
In the late light.
Cars rustle, sharp
Like leaves.

(p. 511)

With the coming of the Holocaust, Teller, like Glatshteyn, moved from hermeticism to socially engaged talk-verse. After a long period of silence, he returned to poetry, again with the brevity of his early poems.

The *In Zikh* movement began in the wake of both Europe's great revolutionary upheavals and the United States' conservative reaction that culminated in the crushing of the Wobblies, the deportation of foreign-born "agitators" and a virtual halt to immigration. It is the latter which was to have the greatest impact on Yiddish culture. Already many first-generation American Jews were rejecting the culture of their parents and embracing the melting-pot ideology promoted in the public schools. Too often, Yiddish was seen as a badge of ignorance, spoken by parents imprisoned in factory jobs and self-created ghettos because of their cultural handicaps. Soon, a generation of novelists and essayists would emerge, publishing in *Partisan Review* and *New Masses,* who would create the image of American Jewish writing in the minds of many readers. Yiddish literature would be left behind by a generation of Jews barely aware of its existence. The writers of Yiddish poetry, nonetheless, continued on with their work, imbued with a deep sense of mission and purpose. Jacob Glatshteyn, in a 1938 essay, states "I just cannot be afraid of the word 'Ghetto,' because both economically and culturally, for me, ghetto means the greatest part of my life. The coercion to see my own brother, hear his language, see myself in my own national mirror is, for me, no coercion."

Were the *In Zikh* poets Modernists in the literary handbook definition? Not quite. Unlike Pound or Eliot, they were marginal members of a marginal community writing in a stateless language that even many of its

speakers thought to be, at best, a German dialect. Rather than the Modernist strategy of reclothing past tropes in contemporary technique, the *In Zikh* poets were more interested in extending the Yiddish language and breaking from the intertextual web of Talmudic and Midrashic references that dominated much of the previous Yiddish poetries. "In our age," states the Introspectivist manifesto of 1919, "of the big metropolis and enormous variety in all domains, this life becomes a thousandfold more complicated and entangled. We Introspectivists feel the need to convey and express it." The modernism of the *In Zikh* movement was in the successful adaptations of techniques associated with the avant-garde movements of the time. Mayakovsky and the Russian Futurists were influential to a community where many were fluent in Russian (many Yiddish poets turned out to hear him read during his American tour of 1925); no doubt some of the manners of Yiddish talk-poem came from Mayakovsky's expansive verse. Whitman and, to a lesser extent, Carl Sandburg seemed to represent the energy of industrial America, with both extensively translated and imitated. Unlike their Yiddish contemporaries based in Eastern Europe and Israel who often shouted their poems in the slogans of Marxism and Zionism, the *In Zikh* poets presented their world in harsh, yet understated, tones. The metaphor for their method was the kaleidoscope, the poem organized as a fugue which plays against the splinters of modern life and the individual confronting it. Although the Introspectivist credo of the poem being a merger of the poet's inner world with outer reality is not such a radical proposition in light of pre-World War I literary theory, it completed the work that the inward *Di Yunge* poets and the more public proletarian poets were not able, or willing, to accomplish.

Sadly, the audience for this work—which even during the twenties and thirties was limited because of the demands it placed on the reader—was to be obliterated by the Holocaust. Yet, virtually all the surviving poets of *In Zikh* continued to write, if nothing but to affirm their commitment to both poetry and the Yiddish language. As Charles Reznikoff noted in regard to the decision to write poetry: "First there is the *need;* then, the *way,* the *name,* and *formula.*" And although these poets never had the audience out of their own language group that they desired, this massive and well-edited anthology will now enable the non-Yiddish reader access to a part of the largest body of non-English poetry ever written in the United States.

—JOEL LEWIS

THE LIVES OF A SPIRIT BY FANNY HOWE
Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1987

In Fanny Howe's *The Lives of a Spirit,* readers glimpse the hidden face of Postmodernism—one with spiritual concerns. As the title to the book alludes, *The Lives of a Spirit* owes to *Lives of the Saints* a remarkable self-examination based, in some respects, on the meaning of experience within the context of the Catholic religion. Howe brings to the subject a poetic sensibility notable for its compression, lyricism and stunning acceptance of mystery. Written in nine sections which are themselves divided into prose units of various lengths, the sentences twist and turn with tropes and symbols so fully that I hesitate on the brink of interpretation, because the multiplicity of the work is, of course, its overriding feature. And yet the book invites a reading in which there is a masterful something behind it all—the poet's coming to terms with her own spirituality, her own gnosis. Much of the work has, in fact, a gnostic flavor—the enclosures, the traps, the boundaries and confinements, the liberation which is a hope and promise, itself a kind of 'knowing.' In Howe's reluctance to inscribe the words 'god' or 'dead' (which appear in the poems, as "g–d" and "d—d"), there is a hint of the Kabbalah with its direct correspondence between Divine and artistic creation. The figures associated with the mysticism—"child," "mother," "hunger," "grave," "light"—are not simply 'updated:' they belong to an imagination which is itself free from any time-bound or narrative-bound era. Yet *Lives of a Spirit* is also a book which can be read without any pretensions to an understanding of a spiritual universe. It is a wise book, with "synoptic realism" exuding from every line.

—DAWN KOLOKITHAS

WHEN WALLS FALL DOWN, UNBIDDEN TO DO SO, / & AS IF ALL OFFICIALDOM / WERE, SO TO SPEAK, ON STILTS & TIP- / TOES, IMAGINARY*

If this art & its practitioners were really advanced it & they would step outside time & that'd be that, but it & they can't. We think consecutively,

* Notes on some recent writing by Larry Price.

even when thinking in a jumble, & the nonlinear is a magic not ordinarily known.

Transgression

For one brief moment time prints with a pilgrim's
turmoil. In which a person is request and stockpile.

Take the number at the bottom and call it "bottom."

To think of time itself as transgression is to use a vocabulary of moralism, heartfelt or not, to reinhabit a morally depleted landscape. It's an odd put, since time is the one mode of human experience inhuman in its scale—& since, if there's any justice in punishment, *we* would have to be the transgressors.

"There can never be enough violence done in language," says Larry Price.

It's like a drawer that holds the key
of human kindness on its shelf.

Statement, counterstatement. The bible says our future innocence is stored in present guilt. The *poetry* of the bible preserves the headwracking. So. What innocence?

From the highest barber shop pole to the little bat-like noun, the rhythm is appetite, an eraser without whom there is no room, no pants, no single idea, no present, no thing where the thing that is is, no recitative bibles on the ground.

* * *

Why Larry Price's poetry doesn't crumble from the pressure of what he demands of it isn't, maybe, a very big mystery. It's not language that does the crumbling.

The survival of the past in the present—the continuation of our lives apart from the sustaining of the body—merely *begins* with language, spoken (because we are always speaking, even in our dreams), out loud (because we don't *believe* that we're alone), in careful reconstruction directed outward, to that "inexistent buffalo" the person. . .

The world is a chronic "they." It is they who self-consist. In the past there is no past to which a further past cannot refer,

> which is why the answers are in newspapers, comics, and a lateral time. . . .What the body lacks appetite provides.

—& maybe "they" is as weighty & as useful as terminology gets.

In Price's previous book, *Crude Thinking* (G, A, Z, 1985), obsessive counting & a centrifugally weighted discourse counteracted a painfully open-ended engagement with what Price there variously termed "The End of the End of the World" & "The Fall of the Fall of the Empire." *Crude Thinking* acted out a recuperation of whatever it is time wastes in us—or so it struck me at the time.

The new work is different. For one thing, it doesn't attempt to "act out," doesn't attempt to negotiate a settlement with time—not even a prosodic one. For another, the new work pushes its obsessions right up to the surface, nose to the glass.

> Rigor is a habit edited to an intercourse. Seeing time see this, continuant nature matures with each complex forage.

Where *Crude Thinking* was tight lipped, the new work is outspoken. Where *Crude Thinking* was elegantly contained, the new work bursts at the seams.

Says a reader: "Wit is this poetry's enemy & self-sufficient appetite. Wit is its program & its How to Read. Wit is its implementation. Wit plunders the depths & comes up with a surface. Wit is too damn witty to be true. But wit is not 'stranger than truth.'"

* * *

Larry Price hasn't gotten around to titling his book so I'll have to refer to it as It. It's about self-inflicted terror, not being able to calm yourself down. Its disjunctions are similar to those that occur when you look at a map that says "You Are Here," when clearly you're *not*. Supposing for a minute that you believe the map instead of yourself.

One piece is called "At the Tomb of Marginality." It argues, paratactically, that men & women are time travellers, born into a structure of impending events past, present & future. "Time's paraphrase is the settled bed of the species," writes Larry Price. Which I take to mean the individual.

Another piece, untitled & didactic, brought to mind a bit of Marvel Comics dialogue. What I like about comic books is how in them character is a given, like fate, settled in endless permutations of expectation & reproach. The heroes & villains are brooding, introspective individualists, yet they're also all behavior. Environment & reaction, soliloquized.

> All that is is the referent, the compound nation with its maps between, its "lesions beyond which" from which the one depends. In its shoes the noun can only acquiesce.

Peter Parker: "It's not a world of my making, spun from heights no spider could cling to—." Dr. Doom: "—& a machine is no machine if it's no machine of control." Which is a way of putting things similar to something I once heard Robin Blaser say. "In Greek drama," he said, "the characters are there for the sake of the action, not vice versa; anyone who talks about 'the character of Clytemnestra' is in a *fucking* lot of trouble."

In Larry Price's recent work, as in comic books & Greek drama, the power lies in a recognition that meaning is circumstantial evidence of time—a different stance than that evident in *Crude Thinking*, & partial proof that Price's poetics have changed, that he's begun to turn his back on "timelessness," & therefore on formalism as well.

* * *

I put a lot of stock in first and last words. This book's run the gamut from Yeatsian affability to Burroughsesque (W.S., that is) paranoia. First line: "It's a lovely night. The gyre has never been tighter." Last line: "'Click!' says the Contraire Imaginaire, 'I'm a cop.'"

Then, somewhere in the middle: "Time is literal and literate." Yeah—it's so. Time really does go by, & age us, & time really is irretrievable, providing a "reading" of the world, us in it. . .

What time traverses, it rots. But language mummifies & poetry, with its vast treasury of thought & feeling, honors that fact.

—BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

THE WORD AS SUCH
Velimir Khlebnikov, *The Collected Works, Volume I: Letters and Theoretical Writings*, translated by Paul Schmidt; edited by Charlotte Douglas. Harvard University Press, 1987.

A poet not "for consumers" but "for producers"—so Mayakovsky called Khlebnikov in his obituary of June 1922, referring, no doubt, to the

inordinate difficulty of Khlebnikov's poems and fictions, with their neologisms, puns, coinages, and anagrams, their refusal to be what we now call user-friendly. It was and remains hard to "consume" sound poems like "Bobeobi," "supersagas" like *Zangezi,* or mathematical prophecies like *The Tables of Destiny.* But for "producers" like Mayakovsky himself, like Roman Jakobson, whose first book *Noveyshaya russkaya poeziya* (1921) was a study of Khlebnikov's poetic devices, or like the visual artists Tatlin and Malevich, Khlebnikov's tragically premature death from malnutrition and malaria in 1922 when he was 36, became the very emblem of poetic power, an emblem soon to be displaced by the consolidation of Stalinism, which dismissed Khlebnikov and his avant-garde circle as reactionary aesthetes, bourgeois cranks whose writings were no more than self-indulgent, often meaningless gibberish.

Only in the eighties has this situation been rectified in the Soviet Union. A major new edition of Khlebnikov's *Works,* produced by M. Ia. Poliakov, V. P. Grigoriev, and A. E. Parnis was published in 1986. In the United States, where Khlebnikov's work was available only in scattered anthologies or in small selections like Gary Kern's *Snake Train* (Ardis, 1976), a three-volume *Collected Works* is now underway, translated by Paul Schmidt and edited by Charlotte Douglas, under the auspices of the Dia Art Foundation and Harvard University Press. (A preview selection from this larger edition, *The King of Time,* was published in 1985.) Volume I, *Letters and Theoretical Writings,* is thus something of a milestone, especially when read in conjunction with another set of Russian avant-garde writings that Harvard has just brought out: Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy's edition of Roman Jakobson's major essays on literature, some of them never before published in English.*

To read, say, Khlebnikov's *Ka* (1918) against Jakobson's deeply moving, elegiac "On the Generation that Swallowed its Poets" (1931) is to come in contact with a *Modernism* not really assimilable to the Anglo-American *Modernism* which continues to be taught in the universities and enshrined in our scholarly literature. "The will to modernity," writes Perry Meisel in his recent *The Myth of the Modern* (Yale, 1987), ". . .is largely a defensive response to the increasingly intolerable burdens of coming late in a tradition," a "second flood of the same [Romantic] tide" (pp. 2–3). Maybe so, if the only tide we recognize is the Atlantic breaking on our Eastern shore. But as soon as we move outside the Anglocentric circle, the theorem, derived from Harold Bloom, that "Modernism" was no more than a "belated" Romanticism makes less and less sense.

"The most scared and holiest of all rights," declared Khlebnikov when he was nineteen, is the right "to hold a contrary opinion" (p.197).

* Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1988).

From our perspective, the strangest of these "contrary opinions" has to do with numbers. To put it most simply: Khlebnikov, whose training was in natural sciences and mathematics and who always thought of himself as a "poet-scientist," held that similar events, whether in the lives of nations or of individuals, are separated by identical intervals of time, or at least by intervals reducible to each other with the help of a few simple formulas, the most basic of which is the interval 3^n. After a lapse of 3^n days the second event moves counter to the first, in reverse, like a train speeding in the opposite direction, threatening to derail the purpose of the first event." Thus we read in *The Tables of Destiny* (424):

> The battle of Hastings, which represented the victory of Continent over Island, took place on October 3, 1066; the indigenous population was totally defeated, the island occupied by hordes of Danes; $3^9 + 3^9$ days later occurred the battle of Glenville, when the English defeated the French on June 13, 1174.
>
> 3^{10} days later occurred the naval battle of Bornholm, July 22, 1227, when the English avenged themselves on the Danes by defeating their recent conquerors. The island was avenged
>
> . . . .
>
> Thus do yes and no constantly reverse themselves.

But further, to complicate matters, events of the same spirit occur after an interval of 2^n days: for example, between the Moscow uprising of December 22, 1905 and the parallel revolution of March 13, 1917, there were 2^{12} days. And so on.

Is it coincidental that in the very same years that Khlebnikov was articulating his "Mathematical Conception of History," Yeats was drawing up the Great Wheel, with its comparable antinomies and antithetical gyres? Khlebnikov himself would have said of course not, and worked out the relationship between *The Tables of Destiny* and *A Vision* in terms of multiples of 3 and 2. But in fact, the two systems are very different: whereas Yeats begins with the individual event or the individual character, and assigns, say, the Gothic age or Goethe to a particular set of points on his Great Wheel, Khlebnikov's theory of recurrence is closer to Eastern thought. Indeed, in *The Tables of Destiny,* he observes: "The impulse to find the smallest possible numbers [e.g. reducing everything to multiples of 2 and 3] is another law, a kind of Nirvana, the teachings of Buddha in the realm of numbers" (424). The moment of pure *différance,* that is to say, cannot exist; there is always some form of repetition, of circularity. Time is thus spatialized even as Cage, in his *Roaratorio* or *Empty Words*

uses the *I Ching* and related number systems as generative rules that provide restraints and bases of recurrence for his "circus situation."

But in the realm of writing theory, we might say of *grammatology,* that Khlebnikov is most innovative and influential. To begin with, *Zaum (transrational,* or, as Paul Schmidt translates it, *beyonsense* language) is by no means *nonsense* or "mere" sound play. Although he could not have known Saussure's theories, Khlebnikov understood perfectly the Saussurian argument for the conventional nature of language and the arbitrariness of the sign:

> Word meaning in ordinary natural language is clear. Just as a boy at play is able to imagine the chair he sits on is an actual thoroughbred horse, and as long as he plays, the chair replaces a horse for him, so whenever we speak or write, according to the conventions of human conversation, the little word s*un* replaces the radiant majestic star. . . .But this equivalence is only a matter of convention. . . .a child playing with dolls may shed heartfelt tears when his bundle of rags and scraps becomes deathly ill and dies. . . .While the child is playing, those rag dolls are live people with feelings and emotions. So we may come to an understanding of language as playing with dolls: in language scraps of sound are used to make dolls and replace all the things in the world. All the people who speak a given language are the players in this game. (382–83)

But—and here Khlebnikov would part company with Saussure—"The word leads a double life" (373) the same word or word group differs according to what Jakobson was to call its dominant function. "Sometimes," writes Khlebnikov, "the sound element lives a self-sufficient life, while the particle of sense named by the word stands in shadow. At other times the word is subservient to sense, and then sound ceases to be 'all-powerful' and autocratic" (373).

Poetry, in this scheme of things, is the form of discourse that denies the transparency of the signifier. "People say a poem must be understandable. Like a sign on the street, which carries the clear and simple words 'For Sale.' But a street sign is not exactly a poem. Though it is understandable. On the other hand, what about spells and incantations, what we call magic words. . .[whose] strange wisdom may be broken down into the truths contained in separate sounds: *sh, m, v,* etc." (370). One such "truth," according to Khlebnikov, is that "The initial consonant of a simple word governs all the rest—it commands the remaining let-

ters." It follows that "Words that begin with an identical consonant share some identical meaning" (384).

The word "consonant" here refers, of course, to the grapheme as well as the phoneme. Thus the 1915 essay called "Z and its Environs" posits "Let us suppose that *z* means the equality of the angle of a falling ray to the angle of a reflected ray AOV / SOD. In that case *z* should begin words referring to: (1) all kinds of reflecting surfaces; (2) all kinds of reflected rays" (304). Before we dismiss this premise as charmingly absurd, easily refutable by finding z-words in the Russian dictionary that have nothing to do with reflection, consider its power of suggestibility for the poet. Khlebnikov begins with "Names for eyes, as reflecting structures: *zen'* [eye: dial.], *zrachok* [pupil of the eye], *zrak* [the look of something], *zini* [eyes], *zirki* [stars], *zrit'* [to behold], *zetit'* [to stare at], *zor* [dawn], *zeritsa* [pupil of the eye], *zorlivets* [far-seer], *zenki* [eyes], *zorok* [sharpsighted]" (304). The next step is to relate *zen'* which means both "earth" and "eye," to *ziry*, a "general word for both star and eye" and then to move from *zen'*, *ziry*, and *zori* [daybreak] to a whole network of metaphoric reflectors and reflected rays:

> In wintertime the earth reflects rays, and so that season of the year is called *zima* [winter]. In summer it swallows them up. But where do they go, these rays of summer? (305; brackets are Khlebnikov's)

To put it another way: where does the "scientific" analysis of language end and the poetic begin? Khlebnikov's intricate language games look ahead to such texts as Derrida's *Singéponge* and *Glas*, Steve McCaffery's *Evoba*, or Susan Howe's *Thorow*. Certainly Derrida's extended meditation on the mimesis of the *gl* of *glas* (*glaviaux, glaieul, gladiolus. . .*) is anticipated by Khlebnikov as is Derrida's emphasis on the homophone as the organizing principle of Writing. Whereas Saussure regarded words like *glas* as exemplars of a "false onomatopoeia," Derrida has argued that onomatopoeias (we might say *zaum* particles) can themselves become *words* by the process of decomposition and recomposition of the sign. "*Zem* [earth]," writes Khlebnikov, "is the eternal reflector upon which people live. If *zen'* means eyes, then *zem* is the majestic *zen'* of the nighttime sky" (305). Half a century later, John Cage suggested that if *mushroom* is next to *music* in the dictionary, there must (another *mu* word!) be a connection between them. Language poetry has been especially sensitive to such connections: David Melnick's *Pcoet*, for example, is, as Barrett Watten notes in *Total Syntax*, an American version of *zaum* (p.7).

What separates us from Khlebnikov, however, is the Utopian cast of his visionary writings. His dream was that certain graphemes would have universal meaning (*"B (v)* in all languages means the turning of one point around another"), and that thus a "single written language" might "prove to be the new vortex that unites us" (364–65). He imagined a world in which each person would dwell in a glass cubicle, mounted on wheels and set on tracks, a movable module that would take its inhabitant wherever he or she wished to go. "Cities of glass, shiny as inkwells" would welcome all those who chose to inhabit them, providing parking spaces at will for their individual glass modules. And the "spiritual sun" of this country of glass cities would be the radio, "a great wizard and sorcerer" that would dispense "Advice on day-to-day matters" alternating "with lectures by those who dwell upon the snowy heights of the human spirit" (392). Immense "Radioreadingwalls" projected in every street would provide citizens with all they wished to know: "a story by a favorite writer, an essay on the fractional exponents of space, a description of airplane flights, and news about neighboring countries. Everyone can read whatever he chooses" (393). Indeed, radio rays, so Khlebnikov posited, will soon be able to transmit "taste-dreams:" "People will drink water, and imagine it to be wine. A simple, ample meal will wear the guise of a luxurious feast. And thus will Radio acquire an even greater power of the minds of the nation" (395).

These words, written in 1921, eerily anticipate the role of television in our lives today. But of course Khlebnikov imagined a media power consonant with poetic power—both nobly serving the national purpose, which must be To Improve Mankind. To use his own terminology, Khlebnikov seems, in this instance, to have mistaken the law of repetition (2^n) for the law of antithesis (3^n). The challenge to rework these mathematical formulas is ours.

—MARJORIE PERLOFF

"LISTEN" AND "RELATE:" JACKSON MAC LOW'S CHANCE-OPERATIONAL POETRY

> "I cannot emphasize too strongly that performers must listen to, relate with, and respond to each other and to ambient sounds, including those of the audience."
>
> —JML

1. Fragments=Meaninglessness?

What are we to *do* with the seemingly-fragmented works of Jackson Mac Low? Another way to put this question is, "How are we to read these works?" Or "What do these poems offer us besides the momentary euphoria and/or irritating groundlessness we experience in the act of reading such work?" Perhaps simply the fact that Mac Low's project raises such questions about poetry and meaning is sufficient to qualify it as one of the most important achievements in the arts (& beyond) in the latter half of the century.

Mac Low as performance artist: inherent in the notion of performance is action. What Mac Low presents us with is a model for acting in a world which paradoxically presents itself as both fragmented (without connections) and totalitarian (all-too connected). He urges a sensitivity to our surroundings that, when taken seriously, forces us into a deeper appreciation of our present and potential impact (both positive and negative) on the world (human and otherwise) around us. As Jerome Rothenberg suggests in his preface to Mac Low's *Representative Works: 1938–1985,* we should approach his books "not only as a text but as a score & manual."

In the series "Words nd Ends from Ez," for instance, we face Mac Low's work at perhaps its most fragmented. What he has done is to select words and fragments from Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* in order to create a diastic "reading" of Pound's work. Mac Low spells out the name EZRA POUND by searching through the text for words containing the necessary letters. The first "E" he comes to becomes the start of the poem, whether that letter begins a word or appears in the middle (whence the fragments). He then searches for the next "Z" and takes along with it the previous letter in order to have "Z" take its place diastically as the second letter in the second "word." The next "R" carries along the two letters preceding it, "A" the preceding three. Then the process begins again with the next "P" as the first letter, etc., etc.

Exultance,
aZloRr-
leAf
Paler rOck-
layers at-
Un e deNho ia
"HaD Ever oZzaglio,
e *tRacciolino*
iccArdo Psit,
lOve blUer thaN oureD
*Eu*ridices.

yZance,
a's Rest,
use At P"
n Of trUction eraNts
faceD,

(*Representative Works* 323: *RW* hereafter)

But again: what are we to do with fragments such as ":yZance"? One possibility:

> When I began aleatoric verbal composition, I thought of the works as being "concrete" (I usually resented the application of the term "abstract" to them). . . .
>
> The very fact that these works are composed of language elements that have intrinsic references precludes their being completely empty. Even disjunct or collaged phonemes remind us of words in which they may occur. Similarly, words and phrases inevitably lead the perceiver's mind to possible sentences in which they might be occurring, and sentences at least *connote* larger discourses.
>
> ("Language-Centered" 25)

There is meaning in even the smallest unit because each unit suggests a larger enveloping context. Nothing occurs in isolation. Consequently, even though Mac Low produces his works through aleatoric means, with no particular meaning in mind, the result is thoroughly—inevitably—meaningful.

2. A Mini-Lexicon of Objectively Hazardous Prosodic Performance Realizations

> ACTION PACK: 56 filing cards, on each of which are typed one to five actions, denoted by gerunds or gerundial phrases, e.g. "jumping," "having a letter over one eye," & "giving the neck a knifing or coming to give a parallel meal, beautiful & shocking.". . .
>
> This pack of actions was composed in May 1961. . ., with the help of the Rand table of a million random digits, from the 850-word Basic English Word List.
>
> (*The Pronouns* 69)

Used as a word source for *Nuclei for Simone Forti* and *The Pronouns: A Collection of Forty Dances For the Dancers,* drawn from by systematic

chance methods. Another action pack was used for *The Marrying Maiden, a Play of Changes*.

In *The Pronouns* these cards, woven together by diastic chance selection into forty poems, are scores realized by dancers. The value of dancing the poems lies in "finding concrete meanings as actions" (*RW* 181). Although chance plays a major role in the composition of Mac Low's works, those works once written are to be seen as determinate and meaningful. The performance/realization of these poems makes randomly organized units concrete through action. Mac Low continually insists that although the dancers have "a very large degree of freedom of interpretation," they nevertheless must "find *some definite interpretation of the meaning of every line* of the dance-poems they choose to realize" (*RW* 180–1; his emphasis).

ASYMMETRY: in contrast to the symmetrical *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*. "These poems are 'asymmetrical' in that each strophe spells out a different series of words, whereas each stanza of a stanzaic-acrostic poem spells out the same word-series—either the title or some other word string" (*RW* 78).

The *Asymmetries* both horizontally and vertically spell out an index string acrostically.

ASYMMETRY 204

still.

took,
island little little

took,
out out knowing

island still.

little angel's nothing
did

little island took,
took,
little everything

little island took,
took,
little everything

(RW 120)

In "Asymmetry 204" the index word is "still." Thus the "S" is spelled out by "still," the "T" by "took," the "I" by "island," and so on until "still" is completely spelled out. The second strophe then spells out the second word of the first strophe, "took." The third strophe spells out "island," and the fourth and fifth "little." The number of words or events (see "eventual verse" below) in the *Asymmetries* is determined in each strophe by the number of letters in its index word, providing for a varying number of events in each strophe (hence "asymmetry"). In the *Stanzas,* on the other hand, each strophe spells out the same index string (the poem's title) and thus is parallel to (symmetrical with) all other strophes.

CALL ME ISHMAEL

Circulation. And long long
Mind every
Interest Some how mind and every long

Coffin about little little
Money especially
I shore, having money about especially little

Cato a little little
Me extreme
I sail have me an extreme little

Cherish and left, left
Myself extremest
It see hypos myself and extremest left,

City a land. Land.
Mouth; east,
Is spleen, hand mouth; an east, land.

(RW 89)

I'm not sure what nudged me toward asymmetry in late summer 1960. Maybe it was the emphasis on asymmetrical design

> in Zen Buddhist aesthetics. . . .Perhaps it was my admiration for the irregular verse of Ezra Pound and of such contemporaries of mine as Paul Blackburn and Larry Eigner. . . .Possibly it was just that "I'd had it" with stanzas and symmetry—seven years of it after December 1954.
>
> *(Asymmetries 1–260* 245)

EVENTUAL VERSE: 1) the constitutive units of the lines are not feet but "events" (words, word-strings, silences). 2) Consequently, the determining structure is not primarily phonological or metrical (although poems such as "Asymmetry 204" are beautifully rhythmic). 3) Corresponding lines of stanzas have the same number of events in them because 4) the number of events in a line is determined by the number of letters in a word (the same word being the index for the same line in each stanza). 5) The number of lines in a stanza is determined by the number of words in the index string ("Call Me Ishmael" resulting in three-line stanzas).

To call these units "events" suggest something of Mac Low's perspective on poetry. The poem is not made up of a collection of things; it is instead a series of events. Poetry = Process. Each event is to be realized through our actions (reading, performing), our actions conferring meaning to even the most minimal and disjunct of units. The poem is seen as a potential meaning-event, not as a record or reflection of a prior meaning having taken place in the "author's" mind and then transcribed onto the page.

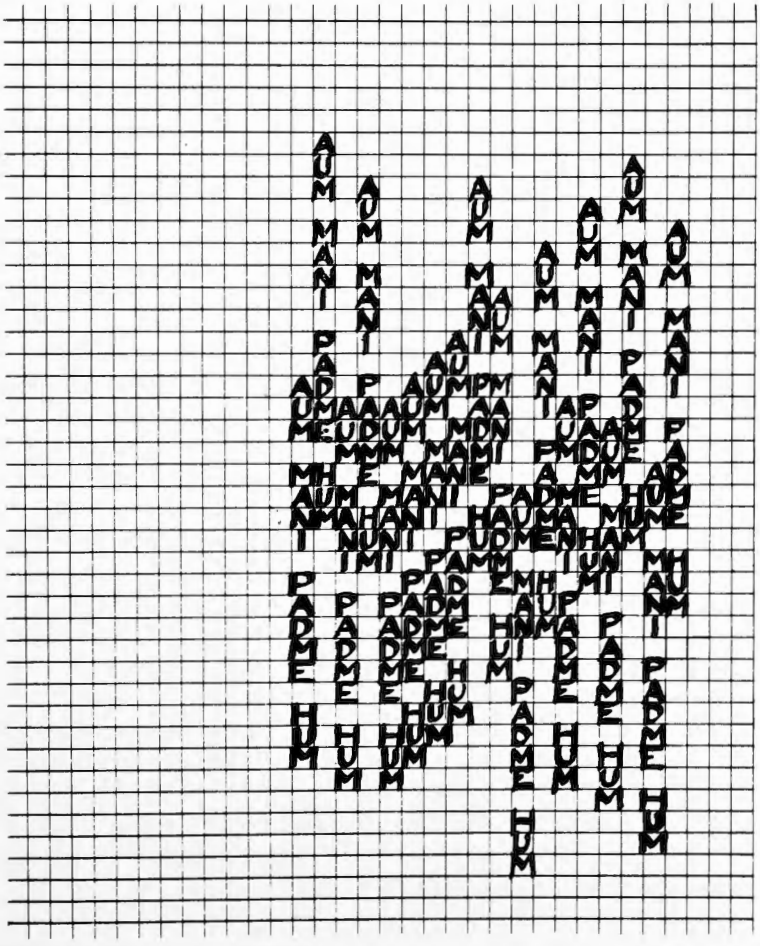
GATHAS: poems realized through speech, &/or instruments. Musical translations and devotions.

> The letters must be "translated" by instrumentalists, and may be by vocalists, as tones of the following pitch classes:
> A=A-natural E=E-natural I=D-flat/C-sharp N=C-natural
> D=D-natural H=B-natural M=G-natural P=F-natural

> The "Gathas" constitute an open-ended series of performance texts begun in 1961. The letters of their words are placed in the squares of quadrille ("graph") paper, and they are realized through spontaneous, but rule-guided, performers' choices, usually, but not always, made during performances.
>
> The Sanskrit word ***gatha,*** "verse" or "hymn," was adopted for them, on analogy with its use to designate versified sections of Buddhist sutras and short poems by Zen masters and students, because I considered Gathas to be Buddhist performance texts. Chance operations were used in composing

them in order to encourage performers and hearers to give "bare attention" to letter-sounds, words, etc. Also a Buddhist de-emphasis of the composer's ego underlies both using compositional chance operations and letting performers' choices determine many parameters of their realization. In addition, all Gathas made from 1961 to 1973—and many made later—are composed of chance-arranged transliterations of mantras, most of them Buddhist. However, beginning with *The Black Tarantula Crossword Gathas* in 1973, many Gathas have been composed of nonmantric English words. Both mantric and nonmantric Gathas appear in this book.

Mani-Mani Gatha 1975



GITANJALI: "Offering." Mac Low as love poet, spelling out, for instance, "My girl's the greatest fuck in town. I love to fuck my girl" in "6 Gitanjali for Iris:"

I

My you
Gain is rainy life
See
The Here end
Gain rainy end again the end see the
Feet. Utter. Cry know
Is Now,
The outside when Now,

(18 seconds of silence)

Is
Life outside void end
The outside
Feet. Utter. Cry know
My you
Gain is rainy life

(RW 86)

Mac Low and objective hazard have written a profound love poem. We all long for "My you," a you of our own. The "you" as pronoun underscores the position of the loved one as an empty meaning-slot, a position of function to be filled by different people for different people. This "you" is not some universal love object but someone in particular who awakens certain responses in this particular lover. This "gain" of "my you" leads to "rainy life," which can be read in its implications of fecundity (water as life source, rebirth) as well as its somber implications (no relationship is without its rainy days, no gain is achieved without some loss or hardship). "See," eyes now open, "the Here end" (be here now, the beauty of the present moment). "Gain rainy end again," in love again after loss (or perhaps this again is a love lost?) "see the / Feet," bare, in bed, or keep us standing. "Utter" words of love, learn to speak the language of love. "Cry know," exulting in new-found knowledge. "Is Now" reaffirms our presentness; this really is happening. "The outside" becomes inside "when Now," fully present, intercorporeal plenitude. The Other is known now. Pause. The void of life outside has ended now. Cry "know," my you; gain is rainy life. Repetition, inundation.

INDEX: the chance-derived word or word-string which is spelled out acrostically or diastically in many of Mac Low's poems. The trace of a hidden presence organizing from behind the scene, fleshed out in obscurity by aleatory phenomena. That which forces the source text to speak itself again, differently, revealing the underlying potential of alternative orders and paradigms. Lexical weight resisting motion while initiating motion.

LEXICAL WORDS: the meat of the matter, forming the basis of the nuclei (q.v.) (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs); as opposed to "structural words."

NUCLEI: the lexical words which serve as the basis of many poems. Roots which are inflected (by addition of suffixes, prefixes, tenses) in order to cohere as a more or less standard syntax. The words which are put in motion (guided) by the structural words.

OBJECTIVE HAZARD: chance procedures employed in the attempt to rid the poem of the burden and desire of the ego. Objective versus subjective; hazard versus pre-ordained. Another connotation; the danger of unleashing the potential power of social objects which have been for so long repressed, impressed into the service of one particular hegemonic paradigm.

SIMULTANEITIES: "works. . .in which each of a group of people performs a relatively independent series of actions (reading, producing nonverbal sounds, &/or doing predominantly visible physical actions) & all of these series of actions take place *simultaneously,* that is, during the same period of time, the duration of the performance" *(RW* 79). See "Synchronicity" below.

STRUCTURAL WORDS: also called "syntactical" words. Words used to connect the basic nuclei of a poem (articles, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, indefinite nouns, auxiliary verbs, etc.). These are the *chosen* elements in many nucleic works (ones in which chance-selected lexical words or phrases ["nuclei"] are connected by structural words). However, in *some* nucleic works, such as some of the *Light Poems* and later selections of "The Presidents of the United States of America," both structural words and certain lexical words are inserted through personal choice between chance-given nuclei. Structural words are the elements which the reader fills in when reading Mac Low's more elliptical works.

SYNCHRONICITY: although chance-derived, things fall together into meaningful patterns. Certain combinations during simultaneities, for instance, may appear as if they had been coordinated ahead of time. "It's sometimes spooky."

> I have learned. . .that it is often difficult to tell, in many cases, what is "chance" & what is "cause." There are kinds of inner & hidden causation that are very difficult to distinguish, on the one hand, from "chance" or "coincidence," & on the other, from "synchronicity:" "meaningful acausal interconnection."
>
> ("Statement" 385)

3. Environment &/or Ego

The question might be put thus: "Where does poetry come from?" From the poet. Poetry is not simply the representation of the external.

Ego/Representation/External: enter Jackson Mac Low. The question *is* about representation, but not in the usual sense (re. reference). Mac Low offers a poetry of re-presentation of language itself; language must speak itself through him. Poetry: an exploration of and confrontation with one's environment—getting to know one's element. Just how important environmental awareness is to Mac Low is evident in the following advice to performers:

> While egoistic overpowering of the total sound should never occur, the exercise of virtuosity is strongly encouraged when it is carried out with as much consciousness as possible to the total situation. Performers should always try to be both inventive and sensitive. As in all my other simultaneities, the most important "rules" are: *"Listen"* and *"Relate."*
>
> *(RW* 115)

The notion of language speaking ***through*** Mac Low may seem at odds with his own attempts to efface the subject from the composition process; but as Mac Low admits, no process, however aleatory, obliterates the choosing, shaping ego of the poet.

He points out in "Museletter:"

> Yes the Zen Buddhist motive for use of chance (&c) means was to be able to generate series of "dharmas" (phenomena/events, e.g., sounds, words, colored shapes) relatively "un-

contaminated" by the composer's "ego" (taste, constitutional predilections, opinions, current or chronic emotions). It was such a relief to stop making artworks carry that burden of "expression!"
. . .But. . .I [do] allow my own emotions to influence my systematically generated work. . .: my choices of means, materials, &c., can't help being influenced by emotions, & I'd be foolish if I thought they weren't.

(The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book 26–7)

The point is that when we take a step back and allow for a greater impingement of the external—when we no longer foreground expression or description as the *raison d'etre* of poetry—then we are able to see the language around us from different angles. Found language is no longer harnessed solely to the exigencies of "the message." Which doesn't mean that meaning is no longer important. Quite the contrary: what Mac Low foregrounds is the very machinery of meaning-production, the role of context in the coloring (delimiting) of words. D.T. Suzuki: "The great fault with us all is that we force logic on facts whereas it is facts themselves that create logic" ("The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind" 224).

Environment is never neutral (no pure dharma). It is always at the service of (or perhaps more exactly, a function of) a particular context. The beauty—and ultimately the political power—of Mac Low's project is the recognition of the possibility of alternative contexts. The present hegemonic form of organization is only one possible context among others. There is always the possibility of the redistribution of the materials at hand. Alternatives: Democracy, Anarchy, Peace.

> The state of no-mind-ness refers to the time prior to the separation of mind and world, when there is yet no mind standing against an external world and receiving its impressions through the various sense-channels. Not only a mind, but a world, has not yet come into existence. This we can say is a state of perfect emptiness, but as long as we stay here there is no development, no experience, it is mere doing-nothing, it is death itself, so to speak. But we are not so constituted. There rises a thought in the midst of the Emptiness; this is the awakening of Prajna, the separation of unconsciousness and consciousness, or, logically stated, the rise of the fundamental dialectical antithesis. . . .The Unconscious and the world of consciousness are in direct opposition, yet they

lie back to back and condition each other. The one negates the other, but this negation is really affirmation.

("No-Mind" 219–20)

On the one hand, the doctrine of No-mind could lead to passivity—"When sitting, just sit." While we perhaps secretly take pride in our striving for no-mind, the walls come a-tumbling down. A perfect emptiness: no development, no experience, death itself. But on the other hand "the original Mind is neither dependent upon nor independent of" the external world. The striving for no-mind can also be seen as a stance of non-aggression towards, equivalence with, respect for the external.

> Prajna, which is the awakening of consciousness in the Unconscious, functions in a twofold direction. The one is towards the Unconscious and the other toward the conscious. The Prajna which is oriented to the Unconscious is Prajna properly so called, while the Prajna of consciousness is now called mind with the small initial letter. From this mind a dualistic world takes its rise: subject and object, the inner self and the external world, and so on. In the Mind, therefore, two aspects are also distinguishable: Prajna-mind of non-discrimination and dualistic mind. The mind of the first aspect belongs to this world, but so long as it is linked with Prajna it is in direct communication with the Unconscious, it is the Mind; whereas the mind of the second aspect is wholly of this world and delighted with it, and mixes itself with all its multiplicities.

("No-Mind" 211)

A dualistic world: the grounds for discrimination and exclusion. The subject/object couplet leads rather rapidly to others, such as us/them, friend/enemy, superior/inferior, natural/unnatural. The goal, then, is Prajna-mind of nondiscrimination.

4. Readers At Work

> We feel that if we read the radically disjunct poems often enough we will begin to feel, if not define, an underlying meaning connecting the ***disjecta membra***. But contrariwise, we may sometimes suspect that the connections and meanings we sense may be our own projections, and that even the

poems that seem to be intimate personal statements may really be at least as disjunctive semantically as they are rhetorically.

("Charles Bernstein & His *Shade*" 57)

The very vagueness so characteristic of the Chinese style of writing is in fact its strength: mere points of reference are given, and as how to connect them, to yield a meaning, the knowledge and feeling of the reader are the real determinant.

("No-Mind" 218)

Democracy in action: the reader as co-creator of meaning. No mere passivity as the author totally encodes the reader's experience of the text. There's also the implication here that even in the most tightly controlled work the reader still has a hand in the final outcome, although that usually remains a mere potentiality rather than a realization of the constructive powers of the reader. "When sitting, just sit"? Mac Low seems to be searching for an action-Zen, not simply a mode of contemplation; the reader must *respond to* the phenomena she perceives. Here's an activist use of the notion of "reader response"—the reader must be responseable.

As I suggested earlier, environment is never neutral; it is always coded. Mac Low exhorts us to take a hand in that organization, to recreate our own environment by listening, relating, and responding. The reader/performer creates a provisional whole out of the disparate elements around them. (For a justification of this pronoun usage, see "The 'THEY' Manifesto" in *The Pronouns*, page 76; another example of Mac Low's desire to reorganize our perceptions for a more democratic outcome.)

Schematically, this "whole" can be represented by concentric spheres: the inmost is that of the individual performer, next, that of the whole performance group; next, that of the larger social group, including audience as well as performers; next, that of the performance space, including room acoustics, electronics, etc.; and finally, the larger spaces within which the performance space is situated: the rest of the building, the surrounding streets, neighborhood, city (or rural area), etc., all of which may affect significantly the aggregate of sounds heard by each individual at each moment. The spheres are best conceived as transparent and interpenetrating—not as

static shells but concentric ripples travelling simultaneously out from and in toward each center.

(*RW* 107)

Subsequent readings of the "same" work will in fact be the readings of different works, the score (the text) of each work being realized in different ways, in different contexts (different concentric spheres). A reading of a particular work in New York City will be a different work than that which is read in Albuquerque. The poem is a social construct which we may choose to *re*construct in various ways to suit varying purposes.

But how, specifically, may a reader reconstruct works which on first sight seem totally meaningless? How is meaning to be realized? Mac Low gives the following advice:

> Performers should understand the syntax of each sentence and speak it in such a way as to make the syntactical relations between its component words clear. To do this they will sometimes have to solve word-class ambiguity problems, that is, decide to which of two or more possible parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, or adverb) particular words in a sentence must belong in order for the sentence to cohere structurally, even when the sentence is (at least existentially) absurd. All sentences longer than single words or short phrases must be assumed to form structurally complete statements, questions, or requests. Each sentence should be spoken with the inflections appropriate to its meaning and sentence type and with one of the sentence-final intonation contours appropriate to its end mark.

(*RW* 207–8)

Thus Mac Low sees his work, as well as much by some so-called "Language Poets," as perceiver-centered. Meaning is an effect of the reading/performance process. "This should come as no surprise. . ." ("'Language-Centered'" 26).

A Little Sermon on the Performance of Simultaneities by
Jackson Mac Low, Written on his 44th Birthday
(12 September 1966)

Firstly: Listen! Listen! Listen!
Secondly: Leave plenty of silence.

Thirdly: Don't do something just to be doing something.

Fourthly: Only do something when you have something you really want to do after observing & listening intensely to everything in the performance & its environment.

Fifthly: Don't be afraid to shut up awhile. Something really good will seem all the better if you do it after being still.

Sixthly: Be open. Try to interact freely with the other performers & the audience.

Lastly: Listen! Listen! Listen!

—GEORGE HARTLEY

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SOMETIMES READING KNOWS: NOTES ON RECENT PUBLICATIONS

From "Inserting the Mirror": "To explore the nature of rain I opened the door because inside the workings of language clear vision is impossible. You think you see, but are only running your finger through pubic hair." (57) Here, in the good graces of an Eros of "the phantom beat between two rhythms" (67) ". . .perhaps it is a misunderstanding to peel back skin in order to bare the mechanics of the mirage." (86) These

apparitions of a somatic alphabet are from Rosmarie Waldrop's most arresting book, *The Reproduction of Profiles* (New Directions). A companionable world is Craig Watson's *After Calculus* (Burning Deck) in which "the wall aches / the picture leaks" (45), "watching / through the predatory window, the trees being peeled / away from the landscape" (17). "To be alone what could terrify more / the verb of being answered by the earth"—such *Flowers of Unceasing Coincidence* by Robert Kelly (Station Hill [55]) are nothing less than *Visible Shivers* in Tom Raworth's resounding title (to a varied and substantial collection: O Books): "When do brainwaves start? / do animals have the right to kill?" Such pertinently dangled imbalances can also be found in Ted Pearson's *Catenary Odes* (also O): "each thing equal to the shape of its 'moment,' / dressing edenic meat." There is an arousing bestial throng in Pearson's spare lines ("the thawed harp weirds its figments of prattle, / toothsome sexemes, a quire of rags") as he asks the inevitable postmodern question: "what strange certitude subs for the thrash / of a discontinuous world?" This is like a subvocalization of drainage arrangements that run through John Godfrey's *Midnight on Your Left* (The Figures), "All the disparities incarnate." (27) These are meat gathas with the semiotic meter left running:

> I snake about my
> body so truly
> I tag it "myself"
>
> Only lust does this
> Only for you
> I make it lustre (17)

At this frequency there's even something carnal about the word linguist. See Mark Karlins' *Narrative of the Broken Winter* (North Atlantic): "Language is utterly extravagant / hollow of a carnivorous plant / into which animals crawl like drones." (3) ". . .and the opening spreads erotic, like a hip full of tools." (Laura Chester, *Free Reign* [Burning Deck], 39)

Ron Silliman's *What* (The Figures) is the most graceful unfurling to date of his dialectical imagination. In this thin—Zukofskian)—lined 120 page cutworm of The Alphabet the skin of attention constantly transparentizes the language, much to its author's consternation. Thus: "Retrofit theory to text." (10) Consciousness as scandal: "Any text averaging 1.65 / syllables per word demands / a college education." (37) And as a lesson: "I am / is anyone's name." (91) 'Language poetry?'—"Imagine a language that lurked." (124) *Lit* (Potes & Poets) is a more varied production, the lighting a bit garish in the relentless punning, the title's abridgement of

Literature signalling a bid for recouping primal speech sounds. (But most of the words do average 1.65 syllables.)

A crucial distinction must be insisted on between the stereoptic clamor of the pun (phonemic Dayglo) and the sputters and groans of morphemic "noise" which, in fact, constitute meaning. As the work of P. Inman demonstrates with a molecular eloquence, "any of the minimum meaningful elements in a language, not further divisible. . ." (morphemes) can be very minimal indeed. The demonstration of difference at the morphemic level is considerable throughout *Red Shift* (Roof) and *Think of One* (Potes & Poets). The title of the latter, after a Monk tune, brings to mind the fact that in Monk's music every phrase *as played* is a rhythmic cell. And each cellular inclination smuggles some harmonic contraband into the picture. So with Inman, the simple juxtaposition of sounds ("peg bop" [54]) elicits a syntactic eventfulness. Prismatic alliances are formed: "ovary vowel as carpenter" (59). In these poems we never know the precise measure being applied (what it's "about"), so we don't "see" the size of the object. "A leech gatherer / might add stories" (56) but Inman doesn't. This keeps the texture snug up against a pure sonorous prosodic imagination that is, I think, the most arresting demonstration of the germinal potential of English since *Finnegan's Wake.*

David Bromige's *Desire: Selected Poems 1963–1987* (Black Sparrow) strikes a bargain between Villon and Henry James, perky guttersnipe and sartorial cool, impeccably sassy in other words: "I've helped you in the past / Go ahead, help me in the past again" (69). *Desire* is the most shrewdly assembled retrospective selection of a poet's career I know, a "blow struck for meaning" (60) in which the cumulative effect of time regained makes each poem, each moment, speak present poignance, memorably thorough, from the opening dedication to the poet's (grown) son, to the eerie freshness of the final section, "Developing the Negative." *Desire* is an apt title for a book that speaks its mind, not ever as tactic but as the tactile measure that "We assume / what we can leave unsaid." (196)

The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume II: 1939 –1962 edited by Christopher MacGowan (New Directions) completes a sumptuous display of the oeuvre that has become the virtual farmbelt of American modernism. Like the first volume, there are massive additions wedged between the collections like *The Desert Music* which the poet published (and even these collections are somewhat altered from previous presentations in the earlier Collected). The additional poems are at least memorable even when not essential ("On my 65th birthday / I kissed her while she pissed" [231]). In addition, there are a surprising number of translations (from Paz and Neruda among others). And

MacGowan's editorial apparatus is extensive and well thought out. His notes are spirited too: "A mouse has nibbled at the bottom right-hand corner of the paper, devouring the 'Williams' of WCW's signature, and possibly the final word of the poem [soon?]. I have printed the poem from this nibbled manuscript." (484) It's fitting that Williams' *Collected Poems* in a scholarly edition, like Olson's in Butterick's adept hands, should pointedly preserve a certain shagginess intrinsic to the bestiary of variable feet.

University of California Press has usefully supplemented Creeley's collected poems with *Collected Prose*—a misleading title, in that *fictive* prose is meant. Cal Press continues to augment their Zukofsky list, this time with *Bottom: On Shakespeare* (volume 1—the text—only). This indispensable work has long been out of print, despite being Zukofsky's prose counterweight to *"A."* As an extended "working toward a perception that is his mind's peace" (13), *Bottom* is a decidedly *hypsometric* text ("vertical control in mapping; the establishment of elevations or altitudes"). Feathers will be ruffled if I propose that Alan Davies' *Signage* (Roof) is the *Bottom* among poets' prose of the 1980s—but I believe it is. At a glance this book appears to collect a miscellany of "critical" writings. Appearances deceive: *Signage* is a devotional text, an enlarged mobilization of incantatory recitations on the ecclesiastical themes of mind and flesh, world and language. "Language is dimensionless; which permits writing. . . .Writing merely carries language into an evaporative sense of reality." (39) "Writing is. . .a thinking clock which does not stop." (37) As Shakespeare is Zukofsky's pollinator, Davies' book dangles its participles in Wittgenstein and Stein—a suitable zeroing in on phonemes, for he quotes the latter while commenting on the former ('s comments on Frazer's *Golden Bough*): ". . .if it is a whole thing it does not need explaining, it merely needs stating." (174) In devotional writing, the declarative impulse is all.

One of the awkward pleasures of association with *Sulfur* is bearing witness to the considerable accomplishments of fellow editors. Eliot Weinberger's cornucopian presentation of *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz 1957–1987* (New Directions—note the date, as these 600+ pages consist only of work written after the poet turned 40!) is unique in its scope; but I'm even more taken with his rendering of Vicente Huidobro's wide-eyed booklength poem *Altazor* (Greywolf), a veritable Missing Link in the legacy of international modernism—and a worthy companion to Paul Schmidt's edition of Khlebnikov (see Marjorie Perloff's review herein). It's not a peremptory gesture but a profound insight on Clayton Eshleman's part to link four eccentric orbits in *Conductors of the Pit* (Paragon House), collecting major works in his translations of Césaire,

Holan, Artaud and Vallejo, anchoring them to a new rendering of Rimbaud's "Drunken Boat." Eshleman's intertextual sagacity has here been enacted as another devotional medium, that of translation, rather than critical commentary. And for that, *Conductors of the Pit* must be recommended as salutary—quite apart from the obvious attraction of having these five writers bound in one volume.

A comparably synthetic impulse attends James Clifford's roundup of Michel Leiris, Victor Segalen, Marcel Griaule, "ethnographic surrealism," Césaire, Conrad, Malinowski and a host of other compelling figures in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Harvard University Press). This is not the place to offer a review (parts of the book originally appeared in *Sulfur),* but it's sufficient simply to emphasize that *The Predicament of Culture* is the most accomplished scholarly contribution yet made to that nebulous but exciting genre-in-potentia, a poetics of culture (viable heir to Olson's "special view" of history). "It is easier to register the loss of traditional orders of difference than to perceive the emergence of new ones." (15) So Clifford chooses the optimism of "emergence" over *emergency,* gracing his text with an alluring gallery of photos like that of a New Guinean girl with her necklace of flashlight bulbs. His account of the Mashpee Indian legal battle for recognition as a tribe is impassioned and moving far beyond the norms of academic discourse. Such empathetic enthusiasm is what makes Clifford's poetics of "emergence" cogent, memorable and above all viable. Clifford's motto is taken from the Igbo: "You do not stand in one place to watch a masquerade."

Another committed and resourceful proponent of emergent cultures is Anthony Wilden (best known for his associations with Jacques Lacan and Gregory Bateson). Two large books published in tandem constitute a *summa* of Wilden's ecological-cybernetic "context theory:" *The Rules Are No Game: The Strategy of Communication* and *Man and Woman, War and Peace: The Strategist's Companion* (both published by Routledge & Kegan Paul). Wilden lacks Clifford's style and poetic imagination, but compensates with an enviable ability to lucidly reiterate the fine points *and* the broad outlines of semiotics, information theory, systems theory, physics, ecology. . .the list could go on. The master-frames of Wilden's books are feminism and war, and he writes wonderfully anecdotal chapters about his English boyhood during World War II. Wilden has committed himself wholeheartedly to getting an emphatically political message across: "Our long-range future—if we have one—is now utterly dependent on those in power coming to understand the basic fact of the new science: that the open system that destroys its environment ultimately destroys itself." *(Rules* 309) In that spirit, these books are in effect reference books, toolkits, or "strategist's companions" as the subtitle proclaims.

Stylistically antithetical to Wilden, but conceptually allied, is the West German Nietzsche-of-the-moment, Peter Sloterdijk, whose *Critique of Cynical Reason* is now available in the estimable "Theory and History of Literature" series (University of Minnesota Press). Sloterdijk's prose is a continual shower of provocations: "The medicine of a latently paranoid society thinks of the body basically as a subversion risk. In it, the danger of sickness ticks like a time bomb; the body is suspected as the future murderer of the person living in it." (345) Every one of Sloterdijk's 550 pages contains comparable excitements. As a whole, this leviathan is a culture-catalogue titillation that assumes a radioactive aura, its author victimized by his own pyrotechnical analytics. His thesis—that Enlightenment rationality gave birth to cynicism as the dominant mode of consciousness of the past two centuries—is easily grasped, so one watches the prose with the attentiveness of a sports fan minding details late in a blowout game. Still, there isn't a more relentless exposé of the contemporary mirage of "chic bitterness" (5)—a.k.a. postmodernism—in print. "Because everything has become problematic, everything is also somehow a matter of indifference." (xxxii) It's depressing to consider that Sloterdijk's polemic won't make any difference in this country of *Cultural Illiteracy* and *The Closing of the American Mind,* precisely because (contra Hirsch and Bloom) it's not miseducation Americans suffer from, but a studious indifference: that is, it takes a lot of hard work and serious eduction to cultivate such an unshakeable indifference to the state of the globe. There are brilliant analyses of the various media (T.V., film, music, sports, mass-market publishing) that have become, in essence, a counter-education—a prosthetic synthesis of our worldview—in the huge collection edited by Donald Lazere, *American Media and Mass Culture* (University of California).

Lazere's anthology will have to be recommended by citation alone, as will the following, as time and space have contracted, and this talkative slalom of books and topics must be concluded with a simple list: Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, editors, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois); William Paulson, *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information* (Cornell); Geoffrey Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (University of Chicago); Charles Stein, *The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum* (Station Hill—on Olson and Jung); Peter Redgrove, *The Black Goddess and the Unseen Real* (Grove); Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Harvard); A. David Napier, *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox* (University of California); Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Harvard); Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England* (University of California); Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Cornell); Kaja Silverman,

The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Indiana University).

—JED RASULA

KENWARD ELMSLIE

Kenward Elmslie has been called the "nearly invisible fifth member"[1] of the New York School of poets which more visibly included O'Hara, Ashbery, Schuyler and Koch. This original group, and the augmenting later waves from Tulsa, *et al.*, were less a clear school than friends whose paths happened to cross at a time when there was a recognized "New York School" of painting, and whose proximity to the art world resulted in their being dyed to match by some critic's hand. These friends came to poetry from different directions, and the survivors have continued on along their individual paths. Elmslie came to the writing of poetry a little later than the others, and from an unusual direction, one which has set him apart from the rest: musical theater.

All of the poets mentioned above have at least dabbled in theater, but only Elmslie has made it uptown to Broadway—with his musical adaptation of Capote's *The Grass Harp*. But Elmslie has, in a very real sense, never left the wings of the musical stage, even while writing poetry as dense as this:

> Gingerbread, gingerbread yore, gingerbread yearn,
> Coyote whim in which the jangling caboose recedes,
> Swallowed up by dirty tree mops, slope mops,
> Tan pine going noodles alone by snow-covered rig
>
> (from "Night Thought")

It was not until the early sixties that Elmslie began to concentrate on poetry: "Before that I thought of myself as, and *was*, primarily a writer of lyrics for theater songs." Lyrics for show tunes and "art songs" are energy-packed: their language events—rhyme, assonance, puns, double entendres—have a much higher incidence per line than those of pop tunes;

and more than most modern poetry. Rhyme hungry, as relentlessly novelty-seeking as missiles are heat-seeking, show tune lyrics are quick to appropriate new popular developments in language: slang, psychobabble, shop talk, buzz words and ad slogans—all forms of the vernacular and the vulgate. Still, they indulge in no pretensions about speaking the language of the common man. Rather, the chief concern of the lyricist is to create a memorable, fast-paced surface, one which openly revels in *being* surface. Show tunes often have little or no responsibility to sketch in or add depth to a background—delegating this to dramatic action and dialogue—and lyricists consequently are free to attend almost exclusively to the foreground of the lyric, to put their language through any acrobatics as long as the result matches the plot in effect. Conveying concrete details is secondary to the evocation of just the right mood.

Elmslie brought this freedom from backgrounding concerns, a taste for a high number of verbal events, and a love for ephemeral "iffy-spiffy" language along with him when he came to poetry. (His six opera libretti are very straight forward, bearing as they do the full weight of the plot—and as these include adaptations from works by Strindberg, Chekov and even a novel by Henry James, this weight is considerable.) Elmslie's concerns in his poetry are not the trivialities and open-and-shut morals of most show tunes, but other than this the refinement of his poetic style has consisted of intensifying rather than abandoning the techniques he learned as an art song lyricist. In the poem above, for instance, "Gingerbread, gingerbread yore, gingerbread yearn" has much the same feel as a show tune refrain, and the rest of the poem could easily be hung on a melody. (Elmslie regularly does set his poetry to music. There are several tapes available of him singing and reciting his works.)

At times this line of descent from theater (this is of course not his sole influence: Elmslie cites Ashbery, Koch, O'Hara, Jane Bowles, Wallace Stevens and several visual artists alongside Hart, Gershwin and Brecht) dictates the form of the poem. Some of his works are overt nods to staging. "Girl Machine" and "Palm Casino" both use mirroring word columns to suggest both a choral effect and the geometric hokum of Busby Berkeley choreography:

> glamor pallor wax blonde bombshell pallor glamor
> hospital bed tableau tata hospital bed tableau
> roses roses I HAD THE CRAZIEST DREAM roses roses
>
> (from "Palm Casino")

As with other techniques initially inspired by his theater experiences, Elmslie take this further, at times utilizing topiary poems (as Elmslie has

referred to his shaped works) to make William Blakesque points about the limits of our perceptions. In "Beauticians II" the word block

> The Mayan Head Priest
> gazed down at the hum
> sacrifice on the alt
> laying there, eyes shu
> he poignant sight gav

(which continues on for some twenty more lines) may be incomprehensible at first glance. Then we realize that words have been sheared off both sides, as if by the edges of one of Blake's narrow slits of perception, and that if the missing type were restored the text would form a flat-topped pyramid—a Mayan pyramid. The difficulty in reading Elmslie is no different than the disorientation we feel upon first facing any other exotic edifice.

There has been some notice taken of the place of the show tune and art song lyrics within the greater body of poetry. Anthony Burgess tells us such lyrics were Phillip Larkin's first inspirations, and that T.S. Eliot admired their craftsmanship, wit and taste. Burgess, who in addition to his novels has written show tune lyrics, provides us in the course of his consideration with a handy definition of wit: "the reconciliation of disparities in the smallest possible form."[2] This aptly describes Elmslie's intent, and his characteristic procedure. If someone were to write a topiary poem for Elmslie himself the shape would have to be that of a distillery, a moonshine still hidden away in the Vermont forest where he makes his summer home. For the most prominent characteristic of Elmslie's poetry—and again this can be seen as an intensified lyric technique—is its great density: everything is boiled down to its purest essence, its spirit made high proof. (John Ashbery also thinks of Elmslie as producing potables, describing his tone as that of "a mad scientist who has swallowed the wrong potion in his lab and is desperately trying to get his calculations on paper before everything closes in.")[3]

Burgess' "reconciliation of differences in the smallest possible form" certainly describes Elmslie's distillations of events from his own life in these stanzas from "Bio:"

> from crazy brat reading Krazy Kat
> to Kafkaesque this Kafkaesque that
>
> . . .
>
> trek aids
> sped up the decades

loved ones
reruns

. . .

and me, the figure in the carport, the proverbial carport
unrafeened laff fiend dreaming of a far port

and this, from "Pre-Deco":

I recall innocent ice tracks (How #1)
vanish in mid-rink
scooped up by some sky creature
into love's wild domain,
signed—The Brain.

As can be seen in these examples, Elmslie's characteristic emotional stance is that of someone at "an awkward age," a threshold time, a time of transition from innocence and insulation and general longings, to one of knowledge and responsibility, and the discomfort of knowing how things really are. The innocent's love of word games and simple silliness is present ("Where Nureyev was rolling in the red fjord / and the red Ford with Robert Redford. . .") even while, at heart, that which lies ahead is already known ("Monster Worship I," the poem which begins with the line just above, concludes with "Boom psychology / blinds us to the stench of the rubbery super- / structures. . .No re-entry. Unnerved by the wind").

And Elmslie finds this threshold terror not only in the coming-of-age situation as it is commonly recognized, but also in situations which he recognizes as being possessed of similar emotions. He makes us see, for example, the parallel between an adolescent's horrified fascination with his coming change of life, and—a favored Elmslie target—the nervous and smug use of "in" jargon by the upwardly mobile. In both situations he points out the sense of straining toward even while holding back from the success and fulfillment that await, that seem to want only the mastering of the outward forms of their possession before being realized.

Evocations of this emotional see-sawing have been a consistent thread in Elmslie's work, visible from "White Attic," the first poem in his first full-length poetry collection, to his 1987 prose extravaganza *26 BARS*. This work, an alphabetical arrangement of imaginary drinking establishments (with illustrations by Donna Dennis), shows that Elmslie finds this fear of not fitting in not only in individuals and in their circumstances, but in the man-made environment as well. Here he is describing the ambience of a bar called the "YX" (formerly the "CLUB ONYX"), and letting us see America itself see-sawing:

> These days, YX is saturated with the freeze and drop ambience of a boogie fortress. The hype of slum come-on, constructed from scratch, cost the Zurich consortium a bundle. The O and N never made it back up—a hustle snare. Inside, the fast-lane bar is connected to the party hard laundromat. Singles with impeccable payment histories predominate.

Standing as he is in the wings, Elmslie is uniquely qualified to speak for the essence of modern America—an America of unstable, playacting surfaces; of stage flats.

—W.C. BAMBERGER

NOTES

1 From "A Tribute to Kenward Elmslie," by Michael Silverblatt. *Barney #4* (1984); p. 80.

2 From Burgess' *This Man and Music* (N.Y., McGraw-Hill; 1983). The chapter called "Under The Bam" (pp. 96–116).

3 From Ashbery's appreciation of Elmslie, "Figure in the Carport." *Parnassus* Summer 1976.

THE ROMANCE THING BY ANNE WALDMAN. Flint, MI: Bamberger Books, 1987

When Anne Waldman was a child, she dreamed of being an ambassador. As an adult she remained loyal to her dream, travelling extensively and keeping an account of the journey. In *The Romance Thing,* Waldman brings together travel journals from throughout her life. While the places, persons and tones of the pieces vary enormously, the commitment to being Open To Experience remains constant throughout. The sensual, the exotic, and the perennially curious are the basis of a first-person narrative account which constantly tests boundaries—borders between nations, governments, languages, sexes and lovers. From Zurich to Berlin, Egypt to Puerto Rico, Waldman is embroiled in the kind of events which visit only those who are strong enough to invite them. It is a "story of desire and intrigue and what happens." The characters include a myrrh-smelling lover of Arafat, the famous, the deluded, the saviors of mankind, the spurned & ignored. The writing is fast, clean & tight—as

one might expect from a book that equates the "velocity and duration" of travel with the song and sound of the poem: "I would be necessary vowels and consonants too," she writes, "and condescend to speak with the breath of my 5 ancient sisters: the Winds of Thrusting, Hiding, Summoning, Gentle and Wheel. I meet them in the deserts of the world. I summon them up when you aren't looking. My scope and map are dedicated to sound reason. And my view through this lens is passion. Let it disturb the porous, and crack the solid. It is this way I travel out of sound to be one of milk & sorrow, and one of strength & metal."

—DAWN KOLOKITHAS

I HAD NO IDEA / *PICK UP THE HOUSE!** for Anselm Hollo

Best, then, to go outside, slowly through the brick door, & out into the yard. A face, looking up, may cause you to trip down stairs, but *your hands* casting about *& your eyes* shown the ground ('if you're lucky!') by these 'stars' may help you to *land* & regather yourself ('freely') forward to view *the stars—on the flat* ('fundament') from two legs / by the beans, shot up out of the ground & bearing *more* beans, on their leafy vines. *(Ever see 'The 7 Sisters'??—or* been able to see *only six* stars, as 'The Pleiades'???) Or it may be dark—*too dark to see!* ('overcast' / 'too much gas')—so you go inside to read, 'instead', this poem about Reading—

*

Slowly
the eye scans the page

The heart
beats steadily

while the mind winces in
in infinitesimal
spasms of almost prenatal pleasure

* *Pick Up The House*, Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1987.

Down in the street
it is divided
into three parts:
sidewalk, street proper,
sidewalk: large things
of equally inelastic matter
on either side

These, inhabited
by home-grown beings

several of whom are reading too

the karmic revelations
of so many
silly and lovable cells

conjoined in the bliss that feeds
them, and on them, too

Thus holding them

(now turn the page)

(from "After Novalis")—I can't imagine an EGYPTIAN reading a piece of *Bandage,* mixed with *Skin,* to better success!

Reading is something, you are doing now, too! *(where*—in the *teeth?* (the 'all-devouring') of the photo on back cover?—does 'the Voice' come from??)—especially if ('Vox Box') you are reading it aloud! (Remarking the absolutely 'alien' quality of "home-grown beings" on p. 26—but 'homey', too!) Aloud comes the human mind forth from the *vox box—not a pox,* but a, an infinitesimal trying of 'the Dentist' (for example) to fill the Hole (e.g. the home-land of 'the Delaware'—perhaps, Delaware—as such 'referent' 'exists' in *The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper)==AND HE DOTH FILL THE VOID==(the Brain / the Earth) (with 'sensation') *(Maya),* with music, 'tuning', etc.—'ghosts', but nowadays, NO poet has better claim to a Seat in 'Congress', *or* the use of the word "we"—

August

Hot sunny Baltimore day,
walking through the park,
holding her hand, touching her waist.

holding her hand, touching her waist.
Checking out the zoo,
in and out the gates.
Sun sets. Oh, Ted, we miss you,
whistling in the dark.

It's *great* that

someone remembers,
makes much of it

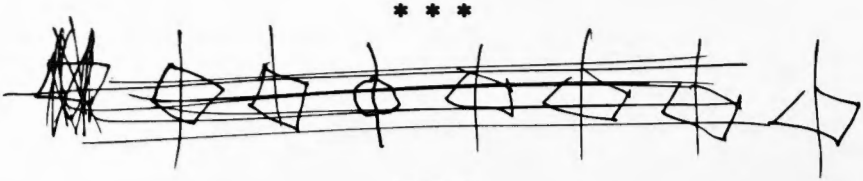
* * *

Himself, he hath the gift of gab, & truly believes in the HOST *(multitude)*—strangeness of life, *plus* the existence of 'clarification'—('horses'—MONGOLS?—'LAPS'?) (grandpa / gramma) trust & love amongst friends. These *'spiritual'* factors—ranking foremost among them, consideration of place of human beings in Larger Scheme of Things—promote renewed consideration of 'material' (Mother, Matter).

* * *

What's in a name?—ANSELM *(solid)* HOLLO (hollo), HALLOO!!
Was St. Anselm 'solid'? (look up "Anselm" in library) (meaning of "Void")

* * *



* * *

plus, of course, man-standing-beside-his-word, *sinceritas* & Taoism & *many* of the *Confucian* virtues—but *Chung* as imperative to locate *A* ('Ch'ing ming') ('cultural gyroscope') by going to the center of the group's fire & therein conversing & making observation & singing & dancing pronouncements. A man to be trusted with your life, whose behavior is erratic, comedic, 'tribal' & profound—

* * *

The stranger who is *more* loc(al) than yourself (if you happen to be *at all* 'Nordic,' & the book is published in Minneapolis)

* * *

LOCAL AL

Local Al
could not be
more local
than myself—
but he is / it's true!

* * *

Upon publication of this book, the *real* poet of Minnesota is not Robert Bly, nor Mr. Trygve Yngve, but Anselm Hollo (currently fraternizing with the Mormons!)

* * *

Anselm is not 'loco'—he is *for real*—like, 'the Best of Ezra Pound & Joanne Kyger,' attitudinally, he is *a measure & cultural locus*—he's 'lear*ned,*' that from (but there must have been *examples* in the family) 'genes,' too—I mean, 'simply' inherited animal capacity ("Yet each and every ant knows exactly what")+ *'fairness'* as coded (codified) ('evolving') Law as the meeting-ground of equal / *diverse* proud persons, granting each other time & space to speak & move & act at the Thing (or more domestically, the 'Legislature in Sacramento'), as the one-in-the-many & the many-in-the-one, for the differently perceived *common good*—what *warfare* & *arguments* (accords) existed between them!—because they allowed each other to exist!—*& what accords* (have been) have been reached, *amongst* them!

* * *

If it's 'too late' for such a poet to exist, for the 'welfare of his people', then perhaps he's here as a 'time-travelling' visitor—*from your own life*—an emissary *(judge)* (that 'magical') & friend, in the role of a 'literary exemplar'—an *impossible* example (paradoxically, often enough a solitary individual, 'like you & me', sitting in front of the television).

For example, to set sail, across the sea, into the Sight—into the Pacific—'in search of'. . .?—'combat', 'advantage', 'Geld'(?), ('Knowledge')—*'travel'?—I wonder. . .*(certainly, no longer 'prestige at home')—for, whilst

you are gone. . ., your kinsman, or *kinswoman* "Griselda" makes off with your wife, your daughters, your brethren *or* combined with some heathen, sea-roving, mirror-like adventurer turns them into slaves of some different, bored, 'what-if' technology? What's *'new'?*

* * *

What he 'envinces' is not adequately said by the word "perspective"—on the other hand, just being a "person" now seems unimaginary ('inevitable'), uneventful! *Why not, what is it?* It's 'Story'—*it's being alive!* It's like you can only truly imagine the *difference* (to say 'nothing / of a 'right' way to behave) from *inside* the situation—*'There* you can *think!'*—*of* the Mythological—of its 'right to exist', as 'itself', by dint / in light of 'something else' that grants it its peculiar fortitude & 'opportunity'—INSOFAR AS LIFE IS, SOCIAL LIFE IS!—*via* the 'local mythological', the 'Middle Voice'—(". . .*see your face*. . .")

But what if 'social life' *is not* (??). . .& 'poetry' neither!

* * *

(ARGUMENT FOR IT BEING "not") / ('somewhat paltry' ARGUMENT FOR IT BEING)

* * *

But since *Pick Up The House exists, that proves* the existence of 'poets like Anselm Hollo' *(who?)* ('and others'!)—& if *he* still exists, *then* the fact & 'concept' of (moving among) a 'various & "complicated" *Society' is possible,* as well as *desirable*—that's my *(upbeat)* reading of the actually demonstrably *'cultural'* project of Anselm's work (where 'pick up' means 'to improve').

* * *

It's a good book—nice choice of material (& active re-lining!) from previous book *(Heavy Jars)*+ superior new stuff—*but why start suddenly Capitalizing* ("I") *& punctuating??* (Should *I* begin capitalizing & punctuating?)

* * *

Like 'the Devil', there's another side to it—*a 'wild side'*—though not 'evil' or 'destructive', necessarily—just a desire to START ALL OVER AGAIN, on this STILL GREEN PLANET—counteracted by fatal jollity's

need to *dance away the Night* on this (carmine) 'ball' that is still spinning—

Nowadays, it's hard to know *what to do* with the "House" (except 'smash it', etc.) for the benefit of (WHO?)—once you got it up in the air—what to make of it, *see* in it *(see as)* except DOOM?

* * *

In *Pick Up The House,* the 'two-worlds' (Life & Death) are 'co-materially' / concurrently kept spinning—very like our present day, you may note!—except inhabiting the place more, conceptually smarter & warmer—'solid' / 'abstract', with the ancient human (seeing-the-whole-place) *dignity* & skeptical tolerance / loving fairness that lives & *tries* in the (extremely *'civilized')* writing of D.H. Lawrence—

TEXT

'twould act, thence sing, the *'true'* progress of the event

* * *

What's the *'structural'* reason for the existence of the 'local' time in the work, as its 'ground' / 'bass' or 'cello', etc. ('Necessity')—when any *one* could be 'anything' (given 'funds' & 'training' & 'the right manager', apparently)?—I *hope* it's not *just* the force of a 'stern' local goddess!!

* * *

(Quote "Question" & "How It Works" on opposite sides of same page (or two facing pp's), as p. 48 & 49, in *PUTH)*

* * *

Do intensive reading of "Valid" (p. 50), showing its various angles & 'meanings' (viewed 'sociologically')—how the 'who's speaking', e.g., can be inhabited by several persons (Anselm, Mexican 'character' who's crossed the border successfully & obtained *"pasaporte"* now prides himself on his superiority over his (2) 'brothers', gringo who 'converts' to (self-deprecating) sympathy for downtrodden from scenic hillside, etc.)—how such "an ensemble of texts" *can* be "(t)he culture of a people" (p. 51)—

—ROBERT GRENIER

RECENT READING

Like most writers I read new and older books together, often relative to my own research projects. What follows is a very heterogeneous list of recent books (some of which I've only glanced at; and I have not repeated books on Jed Rasula's list) and slightly older ones that I've read with interest over the past six months.

Re. Upper Paleolithic research (an ongoing project over the past decade): Hans Peter Duerr's *Dreamtime (Concerning the Boundary between Wilderness and Civilization)* (Blackwell, 1987) is packed with up-to-date information on the flights, potions, and intentions of the shamans and witches who cross back and forth between boundaries. Duerr, a kind of scholar-Castaneda, provides a well-written (and translated, by Felicitas Goodman) 139 page text, accompanied by 231 pages of footnotes, and an 86 page bibliography. The book is best read by having two copies, open side by side, so one can shuttle back and forth between text and notes. While in the Dordogne this June, I picked up a copy of Lya Dams' *Les Peintures Rupestres du Levant Espagnol* (Paris, Picard, 1984), which apparently is the first illustrated survey of decorated Spanish rock shelters, over 200 of which have been discovered with nearly 8000 paintings. Robert McCully's *Jung and Rorschach* (Spring, 1987) applies Jungian ideas to Rorschach's plates by examining Upper Paleolithic images and also includes an appendix on Adolf Eichmann's Rorschach protocol.

Wolfgang Giegerich's essay, "The Nuclear Bomb and the Fate of God" (Spring Annual, 1985) led me to James Hillman's "Wars, Arms, Rams, Mars: On the Love of War" *(Facing Apocalypse,* Spring, 1987), which led me to Richard Rhodes' *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (Simon and Schuster, 1986), a well-written history of the development of the bomb, which is also a chronicle of the development of physics in the first half of the century. Here is Rhodes' description of the first explosion, at Trinity, July 16, 1945:

> Time: 0529:45. The firing circuit closed; the X-unit discharged; detonators at thirty-two detonation points simultaneously fire; they ignited the outer lens shells of Composition B; the detonation waves separately bulged, encountered inclusions of Baratol, slowed, curved, turned inside out, merged to a common inward-driving sphere; the spherical detonation wave crossed into the second shell of solid fast Composition B and accelerated; hit the wall of dense uranium tamper and became a shock wave and squeezed, liquefying, moving through; hit the nickel plating of the plutonium core and squeezed, the small sphere

> shrinking, collapsing into itself, becoming an eyeball; the shock wave reaching the tiny initiator at the center and swirling through its designed irregularities to mix its beryllium and polonium; polonium alphas kicking neutrons free from scant atoms to beryllium: one, two, seven, nine, hardly more neutrons drilling into the surrounding plutonium to start the chain reaction. Then fission multiplying its prodigious energy release through eighty generations in millionths of a second, tens of millions of degrees, millions of pounds of pressure. Before the radiation leaked away, conditions within the eyeball briefly resembled the state of the universe moments after its first primordial explosion.

While I am uncomfortable with the ramifications of her argument, I found Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography (Men Possessing Women)* (A Perigee Book, 1981) compelling and powerfully written; Dworkin is capable of a muscular, fugal prose that lifts its argument like laminated layers before the reader's eyes. And although I enjoyed Barbara G. Walker's *The Skeptical Feminist* (Harper & Row, 1987), especially the chapter "Kali Ma," I found it a much lesser work than her monumental *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (Harper & Row, 1983), which is the first encyclopedia I have read straight through, at "thriller" pitch. Recalling her information-packed pages on "menstruation," reminds me that Grove Press is doing an American edition of Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove's *The Wise Wound (Myths, Realities, and Meanings of Menstruation)* this fall. This wonderful book first appeared in England in 1978 and has been more or less unavailable for the past several years.

Many *Sulfur* readers are familiar with Charles Olson's *Letters for Origin,* published in 1969, which contains an edited but representative portion of his letters to Cid Corman, from 1950 to 1956. Now we have Volume 1 of *Charles Olson & Cid Corman: The Complete Correspondence,* 1950–1964 (National Poetry Foundation, 1987), edited and annotated by George Evans. It is a terrific correspondence, as engaging as the Olson/Dahlberg correspondence (which we ran in *Sulfurs* #1–3), but with Olson in the role of mentor this time roaring at young Cid Corman, as, partially via Olson's vision of culture, Corman edits the first series of *origin* magazine.

Sulfur readers who enjoyed the sections of Clark Coolidge's "Book of During" (in numbers 14, 16, and 17), will probably also admire *Mesh* (In Camera, 1988), the improvisational movement of which is, like the earlier prose work, solidly soldered to Eros. The two poems of August Kleinzahler in *Sulfur* #20 are collected in a handsome little book, *On Johnny's Time* (Pig Press, Durham, England, 1988), with a cover photo by

Ben Watkins (whose work appeared in our #22). Gustaf Sobin's *Voyaging Portraits* (New Directions, 1988) seems to me to be his finest collection; Sobin's word placement, visually and aurally, is masterful, and for those interested in reading about his work, Paul Christensen has published two first-rate essays on Sobin in *Parnassus* #14 and *Temblor* #7. There is at last a new translation of Lorca's *Poet in New York* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988), by Greg Simon and Steven F. White, and while it is not encumbered with rhetorical improvisation, as was Ben Bellit's earlier version, it still is not the version that many of us have hoped would be done. The opening line of the opening poem—"Cut down by the sky" for "Asesinado por el cielo"—carries in nucleus the timidity and off-centeredness of the translation. I cannot evaluate the quality of the translations in regard to Janos Pilinszky's *Crater* (London, Anvil Press, 1978) or Tomaž Šalamun's *Selected Poems* (Ecco Press, 1988), but I am thinking that *Sulfur* readers who were engaged by our Hungarian section in #21 would find both Pilinszky (a Hungarian, who died in the late 1970s) and Šalamun (a Yugoslavian, very much alive) of interest. Pilinszky, translated by Peter Jay, is bone dry but with the odd fits of black humor that are part of the uniqueness of Slavic imagination; Šalamun, translated by a number of people but mainly by Charles Simic, is superficially the opposite of Pilinszky—but his wryness and sensual humor is larded, as it were, with bleakness and desperation.

Lastly, I heartily recommend *A Kayak Full of Ghosts* (Capra, 1987), Eskimo tales gathered and retold by Lawrence Millman, whose little introduction is a gem. Gruesome, beautiful, violent and scatological, these tales propose, in effect, an Eskimo Grotesque. Here is "Arviaq and the Worm:"

> There was once a woman named Arviaq who could not get with child. Her husband was a short little man with no strength in his loins. He told Arviaq: "If you want to be a mother, go find yourself a worm. They're much nicer than children, anyway." And so Arviaq found a worm and placed it against her breast as though it were a little child. She nursed it until she ran out of milk and then she nursed it under her armpits. Soon the worm began to grow large. And the larger it grew, the thinner Arviaq became. All her blood was going into her offspring. And all her love, too—often she would spend the whole day at home, fondling and kissing the worm. At last it was large enough to crawl around the village. This did not make people very happy, because it had sharp teeth and a rather unpleasant disposition. One day the headman and a few others took their

knives to it. Spurts of blood as high as a house shot up from its body and the worm shrivelled back to its original size. Poor Arviaq watched all of this and afterwards beat her head against a rock, crying: "My dear little child, my dear little child."

Told by Ib Brodersen, seal hunter,
Angmagssalik, East Greenland.

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

"AND THE MIND GO FORTH TO THE END OF THE WORLD": JOHN CLARKE. *FROM FEATHERS TO IRON.* A Concourse of World Poetics. Bolinas, CA, Tombouctou/Convivio, 1987

Don't ask him to define his terms. If the motion be mazy, enjoy it. Let be the rhetoric of such involution its own reward. *From Feathers to Iron* is, as Kenneth Irby said, "an extraordinarily rich and subtle poetics of world attention," a slippery, loose goose anatomy not a logical Summa. Clarke's topics are worded as: "The Disappearance of Ordering Intervention" ("Crete and the Regulation of Perfective Action"); "Manifests of Momentary Irregular Incursion" ("European Constitution 1500 B.C.—1500 A.D."); "The Limits of Antithetical Systemic Representation" ("American Marvels Since"); "The Strengthening Method of World Completion" ("Eradication of Monotony"); and an Excursus on "Residue as Residence." These are the hooks on which is hung this web of many colors, many paths. The argument is the implications, the implicate order, and like Hegel's philosophic labyrinth the book may be entered anywhere.

"If a poet comprehends his work, brings that comprehension to his work, and adds that comprehension to his work, that's an ordering intervention," Clarke says, and poetic comprehension in its aeonic act, how can the *person* now eradicate monotony in his/her completion of a world ("picture" he doesn't say) that gives strength to living, that's what this book is all about. But don't put it simply, for that's to lose it.

The book, more feathery than ironic, is an amazing amalgam of "lectures" (dialogues, like Plato's, where there is no doubt who's master,

no matter how seamlessly the "audience" voice is woven into "Clarke's" text), referential notes, which flow with the "text" and do more than substantiate it, and a whole book of Clarke's poems, the sonnets previously published as *The End of This Side,* which are incorporated and shed their own fiercely concentrated light on what is going on around them.

In spite of its thrust to present itself as a world-encompassing poetics, Clarke drawing upon a farflung variety of mythological and historical sources, African (not only Dogon) cosmology, Sumerian, Egyptian, Indian, Amerindian, "prehistoric" evidences, *From Feathers to Iron,* in its main, stays as Eurocentric history of consciousness, beginning from Mediterranean basin action, later extending to New World. (There is a notable lack of reference to Chinese or Tibetan material, or to Buddhist writings.) A friend called the book a "Blakeification of Olson." It's described on the cover as "a faithful application of the encyclopaedic propositions of Novalis" (it isn't, not that it should be). Certainly Novalis (the *Encyclopaedia,* Karl Siegler's translation of Book IX in ARCHAI No. 1), Olson, and Blake are Clarke's principal wells of inspiration. But there's also much, much more, listed in the approximately 85 pages of small-print notes, Lawrence, Melville, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, and on and on. Among the books most heavily utilized by Clarke are *Hamlet's Mill, Shiva and Dionysius, Number and Time, Conversations with Ogotêmmeli, Wholeness and the Implicate Order, Avicenna and the Visionary Recital.* Other writings, by Corbin, Kerenyi, Jung, Eliade, Wittgenstein, Peirce, Bateson, Rorty, are ingredients in the olla.

(No substantial reference to any works in a sociological critical tradition: Marx, Veblen, Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, Guy Debord, Baudrillard, nor to Nietzsche or Bataille. Brief references to Deleuze and Lyotard are slighting.)

My brief notice here of an important and singular achievement is only a finger post, not an accounting. *From Feathers to Iron* (the title refers to a passage in a Keats letter) is a book to be read and reread, underlined, lived with. It won't do to take it out of a library, extract a few passages for one's notebooks. Its dazzle may at first be blinding, an uncomfortable sensation, but the brilliance, on rereading, becomes supportable. No matter how much of it *derives* (and see Robert Duncan's attentions to what it means to be derivative) from Novalis, Blake, Olson, Blake-Olson, it is itself a novel incursion as well as repercussion. At the least an irritant, a stimulant, it also nourishes. A spring that won't be exhausted for a long time. *Lege et relege,* the alchemists say, and "One book opens another."

—GERRIT LANSING

After spending the night in a snow cave dug near Carson Pass, I read James Clifford's provocative "Snow" piece in *Sulfur* 21 & concur with much of it. A vulnerable point in the "Many Eskimo words for snow" example is indeed the word "word," which is ill-applied to some of the world's other language families. Given the slipperiness in comparing words, Martin* turns (& Clifford follows) to roots. (p 419) Why should the roots be privileged over other grammatical expressions? "Root," "stem," "suffix," "phrase," & "sentence" all suffer a similar fate as "words." Linguists search for irreducible units of meaning in roots, morphemes & monolexemes, but this leads one far from the semantic contexts of actual speech. It is fascinating to examine the cognitive categories—the significant perceptual distinctions—that isolate aspects of the environmental flux in all the varied means by which they come to verbal articulation. Why cling to the notion that "radical aesthetic & epistemological implications" are only to be found in the roots & abandon the example? The lexemic abundance evident in living speech forms proves more interesting than counting "roots."

The roots of words do not occur in a vacuum. No language has developed a vocabulary independent of grammar or context. The smaller the number of initial stems a language has, the greater will be the number of distinctions created by its formal elements. Boas, after noting that Eskimo languages have a high proportion of modifying elements to initial stems, says: "When the number of modifying elements becomes exceedingly large, we may well doubt which of the two is the modifier and which the modified, and the determination finally becomes entirely arbitrary." (p 31) An Eskimo suffix, unable to function as an independent grammatical unit, is lexically as important as the stem, which often cannot function alone either. This is not at all like English compound nouns where two independent elements are often joined. "Snowball" & "snowfort" (& their presumed correspondence to Eskimo forms) are gratuitous examples since they don't refer to fine perceptions of snow *conditions*. The example is drawn from some interrelated, highly developed languages as they were *spoken* in the 19th & 20th centuries. We need to know in what dialect Boas found the four stems *(aput, qana, piqsirpoq, qimsuq)*, what suffixes are used with them, and how these terms actually occur in daily speech. The number of combinations may very well be incalculable in theory, but in practice I'm sure they're quite finite.

I'm puzzled that Clifford doesn't question Martin's assertion: "There's no reason to posit more than two distinct *roots* that can be properly said to refer to snow itself (and not for example to drifts, ice, storms or moisture) in any Eskimo language." (p 422) I'd suggest her attitude is the

* See source list at the end of this article.

ethnocentric product of everyday English usage & of a modern, typically marginal experience of snow conditions. Just because modern minds may not find blowing, drifting, or wet snow important to distinguish is no reason to dismiss indigenous terms for them. The forms of "snow itself" are temporary, in a continual process of change as it falls through the air & is blown about on the ground, as the snowpack layers accumulate & transform the crystal structures, in the surface's daily melt/freeze cycle, until it finally turns to stream water or glacial ice. Snow & ice may seem simple enough to distinguish, but it can be a hard line to draw in the snowpack. Vocabularies have developed that try to pick out some of the diverse conditions of this dynamic process colloquially referred to as "snow." Martin would simply exclude those terms for phenomena *she* doesn't recognize as being significant.

Such distinctions arise from a *living* situation. I'm not familiar with such terms or their use in Eskimo dialects, but the Koyukon of northwest Alaska may provide some insight. They are Athabaskans whose language is wholly unrelated to Eskimo-Aleut, but who must contend with a similar boreal environment. Nelson lists 16 Koyukon terms for "snow" (pp 262–3)

> *tseet'* or *noodaagha:* snow
> *yo' yi' taa' ts'iyh:* blowing snow
> *t'iyh:* granular snow beneath the surface
> *hoo' tinh:* earliest crusted snow in spring
> *tseet' dokk'aats'in':* snow cornice on a mountain
> *duhnooyh:* snow caught on tree branches
> *noodzaah:* slushy snow on the ground
> *nahoo' tinh:* snow thawed previously & then frozen
> *daa' ts'iyh:* snow drifted over a steep bank, making it steeper
> *tseet' koodi'a:* fluffy or powder snow
> *a' tseeyh dona:* heavy drifting snow
> *noodaagha:* snow on the ground
> *tseet' nikoh:* deep snow
> *a' yot:* falling snow
> *tseeyt' t'ina':* hard drifted snow
> *hogadokk' ggat':* thinly crusted snow

These are essential terms for a people who live in & travel over snowy terrain for 7 months every year. What I find interesting isn't that Koyukon has x-many roots for snow, but that the language developed a rich vocabulary (according to the logic of *its* grammar) to recognize important conditions in the environment. The warm-clime Aztecs have but one

"basic word" for cold, ice & snow (Whorf, p 216)—a degree of abstraction few English speaking people would tolerate!

Koyukon culture leads the language to distinctions of another sort much harder for western minds to seriously comprehend. Consolidated, sub-surface granular snow *(łtyh)*, which has a high water content, is taboo for Koyukon boys "who will become slow and clumsy if they drink it." Instead they gather & melt fluffy powder *(tseełkoodła)* which may be as much as 90% air & undoubtedly takes more time & fuel to melt. Both are considered too heavy for pregnant women, who must collect the lightest powder from tree branches *(duhnooyh)*. (Nelson, p 43) That should be plenty "exotic" for most of us!—essential distinctions of Koyukon life, unlikely to be make by the Alpine Meadows ski patrol worried about avalanche conditions.

As the international community of mountaineers, back-country skiers, & snow scientists have ventured into the white wilderness, they've assembled a jargon to suit their needs. Unconsolidated powder, temperature-gradient snow (sugar snow), surface hoar, depth hoar, crevasse hoar, wind slab (hard & soft), sastrugi, cornices, firn or névé, corn snow, rotten snow, sun crust, melt-water crust, wind crust, ice crust, suncups, nieve penitentes, rime, verglas, & firnspiegel are among the phenomena mountaineering polyglot isolates from the infinite variations nature displays. (Peters, Ch 22) One's *life* may depend on such an ability. Mt. Shasta is just a snow covered volcano to the tourist at its base.

The Koyukon & mountaineering vocabularies arise from a human presence in close contact with the environment & try to register precise perceptions in language. There are some parallels in the naming of conditions which affect ease & safety in travel. Part of the example's power depends upon an acceptance of snow as a uniform item English has but one word for. Its force is somewhat diminished when snow is recognized as being in a state of constant flux. The issue isn't that Koyukon or Eskimos perceive things we can't, or vice versa, but that the "world's" different languages access may be cast in a different light. The same "objective" phenomenon—say a foot of fresh powder—is seen as a water source to a Koyukon youth, a potential danger to an avalanche specialist, and a source of sheer delight to a skier. Such divergent "worlds" may be partly perceptual or cognitive, partly semantic. In a live context, Native American languages display a powerful relation to the natural environment whose contours we can barely grasp. While the integrity of indigenous cultures needs to be continually asserted, the us/them drawing of cultural differences can sometimes obscure what binds us in our humanity.

—CHARLES SMITH

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INSIDE THE OUTSIDE: New British Poetry*

The publication this September of *The New British Poetry, 1968–1988,* nine months on from Carcanet's anthology, *A Various Art,* is an important milestone. Or perhaps it's the marker of a crossroads: a point of convergence and divergence. The publisher is Grafton Books, a division of Collins, whose paperback imprint, Paladin, kicked off its poetry list last year with John Ashbery's *Selected Poems*. If the title leads mainstream poetry readers to expect such familiar names as Seamus Heaney or Craig Raine they are likely to be disappointed. On the other hand, there will be those readers who will recognize echoes of *The New American Poetry,* the seminal anthology edited by Donald Allen and published in 1960 by Grove Press. Here is a much better clue as to the book's contents.

Most readers will know that the Donald Allen anthology's purpose was to put on the map those American poets emerging in the '50s and

* *The New British Poetry 1968–1988* (Paladin, 1988) edited by Gillian Allnutt, Fred D'Aguiar, Ken Edwards and Eric Mottram. *A Various Art* (Carcanet, 1987, to be published in paperback by Paladin) edited by Andrew Crozier and Tim Longville.

following the poetry of Pound, William Carlos Williams and Zukofsky among others; poets who clustered in San Francisco, Black Mountain and New York City, and whom Allen described as "our avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement. . .closely allied to modern jazz and abstract expressionist painting." The oldest of Allen's 44 poets was Charles Olson, the youngest David Meltzer. In between were poets who have since become familiar, even venerated names: Allen Ginsberg, Robert Duncan, John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Denise Levertov.

So why should a British poetry anthology in 1988 conjure up such ghosts of the past? The answer has to be complicated. One part of it might be that the poetry in this volume stands in the same relationship to "establishment" poetry as that in the Allen anthology does to the American academic verse of its day: a challenge or a reproach. Another part of the answer would have to take into account the special affinity between many of the British poets included and the Americans. But care is needed with this; for the Paladin book is by no means an anthology of "American influenced" poets. Rather, it encompasses a range of poetics formed out of openness to the literatures being made in the 20th century beyond these islands: in America, Europe and, increasingly, the Third World. Openness, too, to the full spectrum of human striving, in politics, social protest, film-making, painting, music both "art" and popular, dance and performance work. Such work, while respectful of its heterogeneous past, is hardly concerned at all with placing itself within the narrowly defined canon of an "English Literature."

*

By some accounts there is a poetry boom in Britain. Enthusiasts for this trend cite the popularity of live poetry readings and the proliferation of poetry competitions.

The health of the live reading may be a welcome sign that poetry will no longer be content to remain on the page and on the shelf; that it now infiltrates real life. I don't know: it could equally be a sign that it has devolved into instant and forgettable entertainment, betokening a consumerist relationship with its audience that wipes out evidence of production; and that this is its special resonance with the mood of the '80s.

Of the significance of competition mania I am more certain. There are now, it seems, scores of competitions, offering top prizes between £50 and £5,000 (the biggest, the Arvon Foundation International Poetry Competition). Most follow the same pattern: an entrance fee is charged per poem, and a panel of well-established poets judges the flood that ensues (Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney judged the Arvon competition last year). It's big business, and I suppose it provides much needed

employment. What I would like to suggest, however, is that poetry competitions, in imposing their necessary limitations on the work that's offered, reinforce the worst features of the poetry that is most venerated in these islands.

What are these? Briefly: that poetry should function chiefly as a validation of personal experience (hence, elegiac evocations of first sexual encounters or the deaths of parents, grandparents, pets—we can't all have the exciting lifestyle of a James Fenton, but we do what we can); that language should be prosaic, journalistic, the syntax not subjected to torque or fragmentation; that, nevertheless, extravagant metaphors or similes should be deployed at regular intervals; that long poems are to be frowned upon unless one is a very venerable poet; that metrics should be kept in check.

Many of these features are those cultivated by the magazine verse to be found in weekly journals of all political persuasions (though *New Statesman & Society* appears to have abandoned the field) and of which the competition poem can be considered a sub-genre.

In turn—and this brings us back to the question of the canon—such versifying is the degenerative offspring of the poetry that was constructed as specifically "English" in the 1950s. In his essay "Thrills and frills: poetry as figures of empirical lyricism" in *Society and Literature 1945–1970* (Methuen 1983), Andrew Crozier identifies at least two conflicting models: The Movement (Larkin, Amis, Wain, et al.), and the poetry derived from the American "confessional" model, championed by A. Alvarez.

The work represented in *The New British Poetry* and *A Various Art* (Crozier is a co-editor of the latter) also has roots in the '50s and '60s. Of the two anthologies, *A Various Art* is the more narrowly based but also the more detailed exploration of its chosen field. The book collects some of the best work of an important group of poets who, in the late '60s, started to challenge the assumptions embedded in the Movement/Alvarez paradigms. Deriving their inspiration from European (chiefly French or German) practice, and crucially, from Charles Olson's open-field projectivism as well as from other American poets such as Ashbery, Frank O'Hara and Jack Spicer, their project appears in retrospect to have been the creation of an alternative, broader vision of an English poetics. Eldest among the book's contributors is Roy Fisher, whose stunning work of the '50s and '60s has since won respectability between the covers of Oxford University Press editions. But the real mentor is J.H. Prynne, a Cambridge don, once a collaborator with Olson, whose poetry is a unique extended dissonance of lyrical pessimism and mordant pastiches of scientific, technical and commercial discourses, interspersed with unexpected lightning flashes of the vernacular:

Again
"it has not escaped our notice" that, by
song & dance, men cannot live or move out
in the midst of plenty. We munch and munch
along planned parenthood, getting and spending
on the same credit card. False tedium
bids up each braggart by his plea bargain,
to set the motif as if vicious, viz., *takes*
the getting out of wanting, but in fact
the *Kung* out of *Fu;* the final arts are martial.

("News of Warring Clans" in *A Various Art)*

While these poets were beginning to publish in Cambridge and elsewhere, another group had formed around Eric Mottram in London. Mottram was in charge of the Poetry Society's organ *Poetry Review* in the early 1970s, a time when poets formed a majority on the governing body of the Society. Analyst of American popular culture, Pound scholar and poet himself, it was as a teacher that he was and remains most influential. (The film-maker Derek Jarman pays tribute to him in his autobiography *Dancing Ledge*—one of many to be so influenced.)

Mottram proceeded to startle the Society's more encrusted adherents by importing American modernists into the *Review,* alongside Londoners Allen Fisher, Bill Griffiths and the sound poet Bob Cobbing, many of the "Cambridge" group, and poets who didn't particularly belong to either group, such as the Newcastle poets Barry MacSweeney and Tom Pickard (who had been instrumental in reviving interest in Basil Bunting), Tom Raworth, Lee Harwood and Gael Turnbull.

Despite the apparent iconoclasm the best of the work, paradoxically, reveals older antecedents than that of the established canon it challenges. Bill Griffiths, for example, is influenced by Anglo-Saxon and other early poetries, yet his wit is contemporary:

He went to Gaius and explained it all and told

'Maybe it was the time of year: early autumn, when in
North Sea it all seems gross, clumped from the coops of
rope out

She sat and frowned (with me) in the bar.

The channel guy words on weather.

Sat, rubbed my boots on the table-struts till we
went.

And the guy's buckle under his navel
Glared into
the edges of my eyes

("Compass Poem," *The New British Poetry)*

If obscurity is the charge (as tiresomely often it is), consider the straight-talking lightness of touch of John James, included in both anthologies, comparable to O'Hara at his best:

I like to dance so much & a kind of mania
conspicuously lures me on to your pointed hairless chest
but since here I am engrossed in the reading
of this here copy of *Sounds* & I am not Mechthild
only the punter with his meat on fire
outside the station in the fog I will swear
never to have seen you before in my life
when the Old Bill cruise by on their talking machines

("Craven Images," *A Various Art)*

These poets should by now all be much better known. Perhaps the publication of *The New British Poetry* will continue the job begun by *A Various Art* to remedy this. They were more than a breath of fresh air in English poetry; they were a hurricane, blowing flat all pre-conceived notions of the poem. (Of the 17 poets in *A Various Art,* eight are also included in the sections of *The New British Poetry* edited by Eric Mottram and myself, which together constitute half that book—there are in total over 80 poets between its covers.)

The wilful neglect of the media and the universities, and the active hostility of the Arts Council (who in 1977 were prepared to withdraw funding and close the Poetry Society down, rather than allow it to continue under the charge of the poets) must share the blame for the fact that many of these poets have been scarcely known until now even to those who claim an interest in poetry. In an article in the New York *Village Voice* last year the British poet John Ash laid into the "Martian cleverness" of Craig Raine, Andrew Motion, James Fenton and others ("Thatcherdom is getting the poetry it deserves"), yet could think of nothing to put in their place but vague hope: ". . .the possibility always remains that we may someday see the emergence of a younger generation of poets who might take as their starting point the excellent and adventurous work of

W.S. Graham and Roy Fisher." ("Drool Britannia," *Village Voice,* February, 1987.) Someday? Where has this man been?

But what of this younger generation of poets? They are, curiously, both more and less restricted in the scope of what's achievable than their immediate predecessors.

Let me explain. On the one hand, the climate of the '80s is more inimicable to "difficult" poetry than ever: bookshops disdain small press products, the media are obsessed with fashion, money and marketing, while nostalgia and postmodernism push back "making it new." On the other hand, the young British poet no longer has to look to the Continent or America for a way out of stifling provincialism. There is an astonishing range of home grown British poetry now that does connect with our lives, that makes sense in the same way that rock 'n' roll made sense. There is, with it, a flourishing tradition of independent publishing, something that was almost unthinkable in the 1950s.

Curiously, the fact that none of the previous generation have made it big (or at least onto creative writing syllabuses, in the American way) has fomented a sense of solidarity and continuity among the younger poets. The iconoclasm of the American "language poets" identified by Clayton Eshleman in *Margin* 5 is at least in part a reaction *against* the poetry of their mentors: against Olson's projectivism, or Ginsberg's "breath" ("a break within a tradition in the name of its own higher values" in Ron Silliman's apt phrase). There is no such discontinuity apparent in the work of the younger British poets when compared with those whose work peaked in the '70s.

The poetry of Kelvin Corcoran, for instance, owes much to Tom Raworth in its rapid succession of images:

> trust the occasional radar through the dark,
> the cold wheel cash holds together
> it is a plot against the chickens of America
> the wealth rolls off the Atlantic in neat symbols;
> one dark raindrop, a semicircle of sunrays,
> a pigeon wings it on hard blue March,
> your money or your money and then
> Spring comes with obscene practices in the sky
> from every part of the ranch
> the boys came to meet the new boss,
> the man of style I float my legs
> in the bath of this weather.
>
> ("A Slogan Will not Suffice," *The New British Poetry)*

Even where it most appears to differ (its greater political explicitness) judgement must be tempered by the fact that Raworth too has lately begun to include more overt politics in his work; so that the difference may be more one of the exigencies and desperation of the age we live in now than of poetical temperament.

Maggie O'Sullivan's work is highly fragmented and aleatory, generated out of a deliquescent and startlingly centreless language, yet her enthusiasms for Barry MacSweeney and Basil Bunting are unswerving:

> The Amber
> bidden belly amidst
> cry
> dustling,
>
> peril/pebble
> *endless*
> reed, the day w/persimmon
>
> Flex
>
> raw, woollen hungering.
>
> ("Lottery & Requiem" for Basil Bunting,
> *The New British Poetry)*

Perhaps the most significant influence on the younger poets of the '80s is that of Allen Fisher. A Londoner who once earned his living as a dustbin salesman, Fisher made his mark as a member of the Fluxus conceptual art group a few years ago, and is also a painter. But it is as a poet that he is best known. His early work drew heavily on Olson, yet to understand his long multi-book poem *place* only as an instance of English field-composition is to misunderstand it. Certainly his current phase of work, beginning with ***Brixton Fractals*** (Aloes Books, 1985) is something else, a transformation of street-speak and the discoveries of the laboratory within the purlieu of Blake's London:

> A woman came down the walkway
> lost in transport
> exploded her language at a kid
> with a stick
> restrained by another who breaks
> the rod across his leg,
> We've had enough, got it! We've had enough!

One hour later someone has dragged
a felled lime onto the walkway
Its leaves make a green path
A pack of dogs surround this, yelp
out of phase. Down the High Road
a new siren on a police weapon
fills the walkway
It leaves a burnt fizz overhead
grooves the mud plane on the roof.
Next door fits an extension to his aerial
changes tone of CB interference
in loudspeakers makes audible
amplified pulses from a geranium
in a Faraday cage. A poster snaps the letterbox,
Come to Paradise in Brixton's Coldharbour.

("Birdland," *The New British Poetry)*

Fisher's work can be related to that of Prynne, in that both start from Olson, and in the work of both there is a use of technical discourses strongly torqued by contemporary British demotic. Both poets make their meaning out of the generosity of their own language structures; they do not lean on metaphors; they respect the root past in finding the unknown.

But if this work is a useful pointer for British poetry it points to *a* way, not *the* way. As in the United States, there is no longer a simple polarity: academic and experimental, straight and Beat. I have said nothing of the other half of *The New British Poetry:* the section of vigorous Black British poetry (edited by Fred D'Aguiar) and that of poetry written by and primarily for women (or "Quote Feminist Unquote" as its editor Gillian Allnutt has called it). The compartmentalizing has been criticized. I like to think the compartments are necessary but temporary structures. Poetry today functions within a set of interlocking paradigms, not a fixed canon. All poetry, I suspect, speaks first from and to a community of readers. Yet communities are not self-contained, and it is through this fact that the coherence of the best shines beyond. The distinction between inside and outside is no longer meaningful.

June 1988

—KEN EDWARDS

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

JOHN DOLAN'S first volume of poems, *Slave,* was recently published by Occident Press in Berkeley. GERRIT LANSING, the author of *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward,* lives in Gloucester, Massachusetts. GEORGE EVANS has edited and annotated *Charles Olson and Cid Corman: The Complete Correspondence 1950–1964* (National Poetry Foundation, Orono, Maine), the first of two volumes which has recently appeared. *Sulfur* first published ANTHONY ROBBINS' poetry in #3. These poems are from his unpublished collection, "Not the Poised Moon." AARON SHURIN, who lives in San Francisco, is the author of *The Graces.* JOHN YAU'S selected poems "Radiant Silhouette," will be published by Black Sparrow Press in 1989. Other poems by TOM MANDEL appeared in *Sulfur* #20. RAE ARMANTROUT'S most recent book is *Precedence* (Burning Deck); "Necromance" is forthcoming from Sun and Moon. MAXINE HONG KINGSTON is the author of *The Woman Warrior* (1975) and *China Men* (1980). The excerpt printed here is from *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book,* to be published by Knopf in 1989. AUGUST KLEINZAHLER'S "Earthquake Weather" will be published by Moyer Bell Ltd. in March, 1989. JEROME ROTHENBERG'S poem is from his ongoing sequence, "Khurban," sections of which have appeared in *Sulfur* #21 and *Temblor* #7. ANNA RABINOWITZ is working on an MFA in Poetry at Columbia University. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN'S *Antiphonal Swing: Selected Prose 1962–1987* (McPherson & Co., Kingston, NY) and *Conductors of the Pit: Major Works by Rimbaud, Vallejo, Césaire, Artaud and Holan* (Paragon House, NYC) have recently appeared. BENJAMIN HOLLANDER, whose work has appeared in *ACTS, Sulfur, Temblor* and *Conjunctions,* is the editor of *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France (ACTS* 8/9, 1988). DONALD REVELL'S first collection of poetry, *From the Abandoned Cities,* was published by Harper & Row in 1983; his second, *The Gaza of Winter,* University of Georgia Press, appeared in the spring of 1988. BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER co-edits *House of K* in Berkeley. MICHAEL GIZZI'S poems are from a manuscript, "Continental Harmony," sections of which have also appeared in *O•blek.* KAREN KELLEY lives in NYC. ROBERT PODGURSKI lives in Boulder, and has recently completed "a collection of poems and automatic drawings heavily influenced by the Lovecraftian-Sumerian Mythos." ROBERT TURNEY,

who lives in East Lansing, Michigan, studied with Kesten Baum. A new translation of FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA'S *Poet in New York* has recently been published by Farrar Straus Giroux, NYC. Other work by MARJORIE WELISH has appeared in *Sulfurs* #12, 18 and 21. D.E. STEWARD'S "September," is a section from "Chroma," other parts of which have appeared in *Conjunctions* #11 and *Temblor* #8. JANET KAUFFMAN has published two collections of fiction, *Places In The World A Woman Could Walk,* and *Collaborators*. LEON GOLUB will show new paintings this fall at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery, NYC. JOEL LEWIS'S poetry and prose have appeared in *Caliban, Berkeley Poetry Review,* and *American Book Review*. MARJORIE PERLOFF'S most recent book is *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (University of Chicago Press, 1986); she teaches at Stanford University. A long poem by JED RASULA recently appeared in *Temblor* #7. WILLIAM C. BAMBERGER'S short story collection, *A Jealousy for Aesop,* appeared in 1988; a study of William Eastlake is forthcoming. He is the editor/publisher of Bamberger Books. ROBERT GRENIER, 47, legal proofreader and attendant for the palsied poet, Larry Eigner, lives in Berkeley. KEN EDWARDS is the editor of the British magazine, *Reality Studios*. His most recent book of poetry is *Intensive Care* (Pig Press, 1986); he lives in London.

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